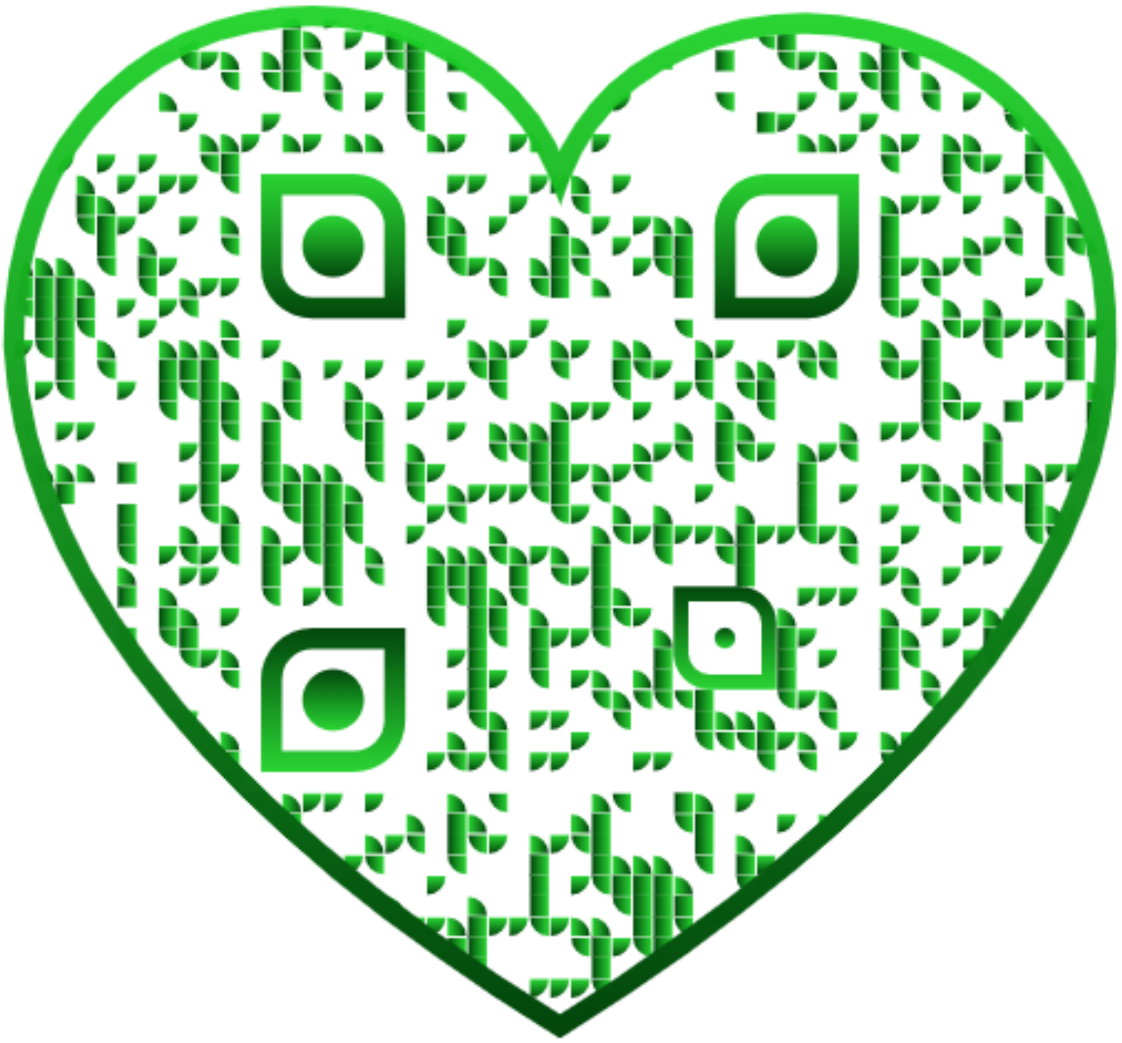
Who's Who in Faeryland

John Kruse



Contents

Foreword
Titania
- Diana
- Daughter of Titans
- Shakespeare's Fairy Queen
- Titania after Shakespeare

Oberon
- Oberon Before the *Dream*
- Shakespeare's Oberon
- Oberon's Later Career

Ariel
- Origins
- Shakespeare's Spirit
- Alexander Pope
- Victorian Ariel and After

Queen Mab
- Lusty Mab
- Queen of Dreams & Dairies
- Miniature Mab
- Mab's Dominion

Puck and Robin Goodfellow
- Puck in Folklore
- Robin Goodfellow's Life
- The Nature & Habits of Robin Goodfellow
- Shakespeare's Puck
- Puck & Robin After *The Dream*

Rumpelstiltskin and his Kin
- The Grimm's Story
- British Equivalents
- The Story of Tom Tit Tot
- Welsh Stories
- Whuppity Stoorie

King Arthur
- Foundations of the Myth

Arthur, Victoria and Merry England
Nimue and Merlin
Older Accounts
Victorian Revival
Tinker Bell
Tink & Tradition
Temptress Tink
Famous Fairies in Art

Foreword

This book is a biography of some of the most significant and best-known of the faery folk. It examines their origins, characters and development, from traditional folklore through to modern literature and the fine arts.

What's revealed, amongst other things, is how deeply embedded in our culture many of these individuals have become. Many people know of the important role that William Shakespeare played in popularising these figures. The later work of other famous authors such as Sir Walter Scott may be less well recognised, but he deployed Titania, Oberon and Puck in many of his stories, helping to revive and consolidate their reputations for his and later generations.[1] Many other far less well-known poets have since embraced these names, demonstrating how completely they have been absorbed into our consciousness, often becoming symbols of Faery as a whole rather than individual personae.

I have decided to exclude from this account various well-known fairies. I don't mention leprechauns, for example, partly because they are Irish rather than British fairies (and it's the latter that I know best) but also because they are renowned as a type or class but there are no truly famous leprechaun individuals, whose names and exploits are known to all. The same applies to mermaids: as a species they are very popular but there are no traditional characters with whom people are familiar—except for Hans Christian Anderson's Little Mermaid, a literary creature who bears little resemblance to the merfolk of folklore.

I have examined many of the themes discussed here in other books, but without the emphasis upon the famous fairies themselves, which they receive here. Nonetheless, I recommend reference, too, to my studies *Victorian Fairy Verse*, *Fayerie* and *Fairy Art of the Twentieth Century Fairy* for further information on some of the topics covered and—especially—for the texts of many of the poems mentioned.

Titania

Titania the fairy queen is not a native British monarch. Her origins are both literary and continental and she was a late arrival at the faery court. Despite this, for many of us today, Titania has become the archetype of the fairy queen, if not of female fairies as a class.

Titania's origins as a fairy queen seem to be Elizabethan. In 1590 Edmund Spenser made his *Faerie Queen* a descendant of Titania, but the character was most explicitly and effectively introduced into fairy-lore by William Shakespeare in *Midsummer Night's Dream*. She was not a traditional character of British folklore (as her name might, in any case, suggest) and the playwright was certainly very well aware of the British equivalent: Queen Mab features prominently in a famous speech by Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet*, which was first performed in 1597 (see later). The *Dream* was written in 1605; did Shakespeare merely want a bit of variety or did he have other motives for creating a new faery monarch?

Diana

The use of classical names and terms as alternative ways of referring to characters from traditional British folklore was by no means an innovation by Shakespeare. Chaucer, for example, demonstrated his own learning by several times calling his fairy queen Proserpina—and the fairy king Pluto. As the influence of the Renaissance spread, such instances became even more common.[2]

Somewhat like the name of her consort Oberon (see later), Titania's name is more descriptive than personal. 'Titania' simply means that she is born of Titans—though this naturally begs some very important questions. Roman writer Ovid tells us in *The Metamorphoses* that Titania is another name for or aspect of the goddess Diana: he described how she was accidentally seen by a young man when bathing with her nymphs: "while the Titanian Goddess was there bathing in the wonted stream…"[3]

Diana was the Roman deity responsible for childbirth and, as such, there are some significant parallels with Queen Mab the midwife. The Romans also linked Diana to the Greek goddess Artemis, who was primarily a goddess of nature, particularly of springs and water courses. She was, for example, known as Limnaia, 'lady of the lake', a name which for us now is freighted with resonances of Morgan le Fay and other fay maidens and such like nymphs. In her guise as goddess of woods and water, Artemis had obvious parallels with native nature spirits as well as associations with naiads and dryads, who were themselves compared to British fairies. The identification of Diana/ Artemis with a British nature goddess or fairy monarch makes considerable sense.

Much more recently in Tudor times, Diana had emerged as the queen of the witches—as recorded in Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* of 1584—and there is evidence that her name was in popular use in this connection in Scotland during the same period. Meanwhile, sixteenth century English and Scots translations of Ovid had made his work much more accessible to readers in the British Isles.[4] Under other epithets, Diana had already been used as a supernatural queen by other poets—for example, Spenser's Belphoebe in *The Faerie Queen* and John Lyly's Cynthia, the moon queen in *Endimion*.[5]

However, Shakespeare had already used the name 'Diana' for a character in *All's Well that Ends Well*, five years previously to *The Dream*, so perhaps

again he merely sought variety—or had pursued her mythical links more deeply. Given that Arthur Goulding had used the phrase ‘Titan’s daughter’ in his translation of Ovid, it could well be possible that the playwright’s imagination had been fired and that he had undertaken his own research on her origins and affinities.

Daughter of Titans

As I have explained, Diana was descended from the Titans, a heritage which takes us back to the very earliest roots of Greek mythology. The Titans were a race of giants born of Uranus and Ge (heaven and earth). Amongst their numbers were the male gods Oceanus, Cronus, Hyperion, Prometheus and Atlas; amongst the goddesses were numbered Thea, Phoebe and Rhea. The inter-relationships and identities of these beings are far from fixed in the myths, but we need not be too concerned with the details. It is the general tenor of the stories that's significant: they contain a variety of fruitful themes and concepts.

Cronus is often seen as the chief of the Titans. He led a revolt against Zeus and the Olympian gods and was defeated and displaced, being banished with all his kind to imprisonment in Tartarus. It's said that Cronus now sleeps eternally on some Western island, and in this respect his myth is very likely to have contributed to the growth of the story of King Arthur sleeping in Avalon. The sister of Cronus was Rhea, but she was also his wife and so mother of a pantheon including Zeus, Poseidon, Hera and others. In this role as divine mother, Rhea is commonly identified with another goddess, Cybele, who was herself worshipped across the ancient world as the Great Mother Goddess. She is another deity of nature, fertility and of wild places and, as such, was fairly readily linked to a fairy queen of groves and springs.

The daughter of the famous Titan Atlas was the equally well-known Calypso, nymph of the island of Ogygia. It was she who detained Odysseus for the magically significant period of seven years and who tried to prevent him ever returning to his wife and home with promises of a grant of immortality. Both the time-scale and the reward must trigger for us thoughts of the detention of mortals in the British fairyland.

In summary, then, these divine female Titans all have attributes and rich associations which provoke thoughts of British equivalents and which tie local beings into a wider and more powerful mythology. It may be for these dramatic reasons that Shakespeare chose the name Titania: she brought with her connotations of power and of antiquity.

Shakespeare’s Fairy Queen

Although she was something of an alien import in name, the Titania of *Midsummer Night’s Dream* nevertheless embodied many of the primary aspects of the fairy of British folk tradition.

The amorous interlude with Bottom, played as it is for comedic effect, still incorporates one of the main characteristics of British fairy females. They were drawn inexorably towards human males, acting often as succubi who visited and seduced them at night. This could lead to long-term abduction of the human partners, but it might also prove fatal. Whether in the guise of a mermaid, the Manx *lhiannan shee* or Highland *leanan sithe*, the fairy woman’s obsessive love could kill—if only by detaining the human in Faery for so long that the world changed utterly and his earthly body became ancient when he eventually returned.

Next, at the heart of Shakespeare’s play is a quarrel between the queen and her consort over a ‘little changeling boy.’ In fact, this child is not a true fairy changeling—in the sense of a human baby stolen from its parents—but is rather the orphaned son of one of Titania’s entourage. Although early in the play Puck states that the boy was “stol’n from an Indian king” the truth is that the mother died during his birth (because she was a mortal) and it is for her sake that the queen is now raising the child. Oberon wants this “lovely boy” and “sweet changeling” to join his followers—which Titania refuses to allow. These details aside, the desire of fairykind for the company of human children is accurate and situates the play’s queen firmly within the customary behaviour and attitudes of the fairies of British tradition.

Thirdly, and rather like Artemis/ Diana, Shakespeare’s fairy queen is intimately associated with the natural environment. Her quarrel with Oberon not only damages their marriage and disturbs the harmony of their court; it disrupts the weather and the growing of the crops. This is summarised by Titania when she tells Bottom that:

> “I am a spirit of no common rate.
> The summer still doth tend upon my state.”[6]

She rules over the seasons and they follow her moods.

This new queen therefore inherited much of the wanton sexuality of fairies generally, and especially that of Queen Mab, giving us the erotically tinged imagery of Fuseli and Simmons that will be discussed shortly. The buxom wenches of those paintings are ironic given the fact that Artemis, one

of Titania’s forms, was also known as a goddess of chastity who was in conflict with Aphrodite (who, in fact, is also of Titan ancestry). Her name may have a classical origin, but Titania’s personality is wholly British.

Titania after Shakespeare

In due course, the invented character of Titania took on a life of her own, but it was a slow process. The name was taken up by Thomas Dekker in his play *The Whore of Babylon* in 1607, but he was a very early and isolated imitator. Given that the name Titania was such an innovation, and that she was being expected to rival the well-established and well-beloved Queen Mab, it is probably unsurprising to discover that, to begin with, this new character was scarcely mentioned by other playwrights—whether those of Shakespeare's time or during the following century. She may well have seemed too much Shakespeare's own for other writers to have borrowed her, with the result that one of the few other allusions to her seems to have been the fairy named Tita whose wedding is celebrated in the 'Eighth Nimphal' of Michael Drayton's *Muse's Elizium*, which was published in 1630. It may also be more than coincidence that in the play *Amyntas* by Thomas Randolph, the fairies speak a language composed of the syllables 'ti-ta.' Whether this was intended as homage or mockery is not clear.

It was only with the passage of time that Titania became familiar to people through the growing popularity of *Midsummer Night's Dream*—both in stage performances and representations by painters and illustrators. As a consequence, it was not until the nineteenth century that the queen was accepted as one of the rightful members of the fairy court.[7] For example, poet Thomas Hood published *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* in 1827. In this, Titania reigns in Faery, but she and all her train are very small: having been compared to a "queen bee," at the very close of the poem she flies away with all "her little crowd,/ Like flocking linnets, vanish'd in a cloud."[8]

To a very considerable extent, Titania's rise to hegemony in fairyland was a direct reflection of the popularity of *Midsummer Night's Dream* on the stage. After the reign of Charles II, the play was not performed in its entirety until the mid-nineteenth century. This seems to have reflected audience opinion at the time: Samuel Pepys, for instance, attended a performance in September 1662 and dismissed it as "the most insipid, ridiculous play that ever I saw…"

Thereafter, for nearly two centuries, the play was performed only in heavily adapted forms. Composer Henry Purcell based his 1692 masque *The Fairy Queen* very loosely upon it. The Pyramus and Thisbe scenes were excised by Richard Leveridge to create a burlesque opera that was staged in

1716 and 1745. David Garrick got rid of Bottom and the other 'rude mechanicals' for a version titled *The Fairies* in 1755. Another operatic version appeared in 1816.

It was only in 1840 that audiences once again got to see nearly the whole text as it had been written, when the actress Lucia Vestris produced the play at Covent Garden—albeit including added musical sequences and ballet. Such was the success of this production that Victorian theatres were thereafter encouraged regularly to put on the *Dream* as a spectacular. It has become a firm favourite with the public ever since, not only on the stage but on film and television too. Productions such as those featuring Helen Mirren and Judi Dench (1969), Rupert Everett and Michelle Pfeiffer (1999), or Maxine Peak, John Hannah and Matt Lucas (2016) have repeatedly renewed our affection and refreshed our familiarity with the characters.

At the same time that performances were revived, painters of the nineteenth century enthusiastically seized the opportunities that Titania and her attendants offered to paint classically-inspired life studies (in other words, nude girls). The stage had been set by Henry Fuseli's *Titania and Bottom* and *Titania's Awakening*, both dating to the decade 1780-90, and *Titania, Bottom and the Fairies*, of 1793, which all delighted in gyrating, erotic and sometimes grotesque fairies. In each of the three scenes, the queen is surrounded by courtiers of varying sizes and in various states of undress; some are deformed and ugly, some are seductive. Fuseli established early, therefore, the connection between Faery and naked and unashamedly sexualised females. That said, his *Titania Finds the Magic Ring on the Beach* (1804-5) is a little different. His queen is a classical figure swathed in billowing draperies as she descends head first from the sky. She wears a crescent moon diadem, indicating her affinity with Diana, and she has dragonfly wings, confirming her more conventional fairy nature.

In contrast to Fuseli, Francis Danby, painting in 1832, offered something a little more restrained. His *Scene from Midsummer Night's Dream* is a moonlit grouping of lightly draped and very tiny fairies, with Oberon approaching Titania, who holds a glowing wand taller than she is. His *Oberon and Titania* of 1837 is an almost identical scene, save for the fact that it is set in daylight.

Victorian artists very happily followed these examples. Amongst these are John Lamb's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (1834), Sir Joseph Noel Paton's *Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania* (1847) and the *Quarrel of Oberon and*

Titania (1849), Richard Dadd's *Titania Sleeping* (1841) and *Contradiction: Oberon and Titania* of 1854-58, Robert Huskisson's *Midsummer Night's Fairies* (1847) and John George Naish's *Titania Asleep* (1856). All of these paintings show a nude Titania, frequently accompanied by Oberon, and always surrounded by hosts of naked and cavorting faes. Several even more explicitly erotic pictures were painted by John Simmonds, who homed in on the queen's voluptuous naked body; these include *Titania* of 1866, *Titania Flying* (c.1866) and *There Sleeps Titania* (1872). Sir Edwin Landseer's *Titania and Bottom* (1851) is curiously respectable in contrast, his fairy queen being almost fully covered by a classical robe. The same is true of John Anster Fitzgerald's *Titania and Bottom* and *Titania and the Changeling Child*, both of which are undated. This artist always painted his fairies fully clothed in elaborate flower like dresses and headgear. They are both demure and delicate.

The twentieth century began with an apparent move away from nudity. Frank Cadogan Cowper's *When Titania Sleeps* of 1928 shows the queen slumbering on a woodland bank, covered by a rich fabric and surrounded by flowers—poppies, foxgloves and wild-thyme—and watched over by an owl and a rabbit.[9] This may seem a very late example of artistic interest in the play, but we should not forget that Arthur Rackham's still highly popular illustrations to the play were published in 1930. These famed pictures have been very influential upon succeeding generations. His queen and her king are noble and handsome beings, surrounded by hosts of smaller fairies that are either pretty girls or young children with wings—or else elves, whom he depicts as ugly little goblins.

The most recent depiction of the queen is an evolving painting by Peter Blake. His *Titania* is a young female, entirely naked and somewhat feral, her body decorated with objects she has found discarded in our contemporary rural landscape. She has knotted grass stalks around her nipples and has plaited her pubic hair, from which beads are suspended. This Titania is very different from the statuesque and rather coy pin-ups imagined by John Simmons but, for all that, she is still surrounded by a swirl of shadowy, naked girl fairies, just as in the canvases of Paton and his imitators.

The new fairy queen also appeared in a succession of Victorian and early twentieth century verse, including Felicia Hemans' *Fairies' Recall* (1834), Madison Julius Cawein's *On Midsummer Night* (1907), Fenton Johnson's *Eulogy on the Fairies* (1915), Arthur Peterson's *Halloween* (1916) and the

Fairies' Fair by Zora Bernice May Cross.[10] The continuing influence of Shakespeare was apparently strong, with (for example) two authors retaining the allusions to Midsummer. Reflecting her origin in 'a wood near Athens,' Titania is consistently located by these poems in groves and glades, with insects often acting as her attendants.[11] One of the most striking references to the queen is in *A Fairy Tale*, by English poet Philip James Bailey (1816-1902). She appears there with her consort Oberon and is described memorably as "divine Titania, night's incomparable queen." Even Titania's typical fairy habit of stealing children was recalled and preserved. In his poem *Silvia,* in which he laments the loss of a little girl, Don Marquis (1878-1937) comforted himself with the thought that not death, but the fairies, had taken her:

> "The fairies stole and hold her where
> Death enters not, nor strife nor pain;
> That, drowsing on some bed of pansies,
> By Titania's necromancies
> Her senses were to slumber lulled,
> Deeply sunken, steeped and dulled,
> And by wafture of swift pinions
> She was borne out through earth's portals
> To the fairy queen's dominions,
> To some land of the immortals."

Marquis' vision of Faery is a place that sounds very much like heaven and his fairies' wings are feathered, making them more like angels than mischievous spirits.

For some, of course, Titania and all her court were just poetic names that invoked fond memories of childhood but which no longer had a place in a modern industrialised and scientific world. For Alaric Alexander Watts (1797-1864), for example, fairy tales had become nothing but "beautiful fictions of our trusting youth" and:

> "… the bright realm of Fairyland is gone;
> Its Iris-tinted train hath passed away;
> And Ariel, Mab, Titania, Oberon,
> But grace the painter's scene, or poet's lay!
> Even Puck, dear imp of mischief and of mirth,
> 'O'er hill and dale,' at length, hath ceased to range;"

Even so, he concluded that the poet's "heart's home be still in Fairyland!"

These famous fairies' names were still the stuff of dreams and the source of inspiration, even to a more 'enlightened' age.[12]

The Victorian period was one during which old beliefs and lifestyles seemed to be under terminal assault. This bred something of a resigned nostalgia for folk tales in many quarters, arising from a regretful but helpless sense that their time was passing away. This mood is exemplified by a curious—and rather slight—short story, *Titania's Farewell,* by Walter Besant and James Rice. It was initially published in the magazine *Once a Week* at Christmas 1870 and its sentimental, moralistic and jingoistic tone seem very suited to a family entertainment at that season. The piece subsequently re-appeared in a collection, *The Case of Mr Lucraft and Other Stories,* published in 1878.

As the title suggests, *Titania's Farewell* is concerned with the fairies' departure from England. The events all take place between midnight on Midsummer's Eve and sunrise the next morning. The narrator is staying in the New Forest for a short holiday and gets lost whilst out walking one evening. He resigns himself to sleeping under an oak tree but awakes as a village church clock tolls twelve to discover that he has been bound, hand and foot, and cannot move. He hears music and the fairy court arrives, headed by Titania, Oberon, Mab, Ariel and Puck (who's also called Jack o' Lantern, Robin Goodfellow or Will of the Wisp). The latter whispers to the human to stay still, and quiet, and he will come to no harm. True to tradition, Puck is a mutable prankster: his "face and form changed every moment" and "a mocking light was in his eye, laughter flickered on his lips. He shifted from one form to another; but one knew him always by his eye, unlike any of the rest."

Oberon looks serious, which is because the time has come to leave England forever and to travel to an island in the Indian Ocean. "But three short hours," the king announces, "but three short hours, and the kingdom of Faerie will be over in Merry England—merry, alas! no more." He continues: [13]

> "We have known and loved it so well: we have blessed so many mansions, dropped a charm over so many cottages, spread love and tenderness over so many homes, danced in so many woods, lived in so many haunts; and now we must go!… There is no land like the land of the English—no forests like theirs, no lawns like their lawns. We love not the rank grass and the heavy-flowering trees of the tropics; the

> crested palm is not like the leafy elm; the scent of spices is not to us like the perfume of the wild thyme and the primrose. We love not the black man so well as the Saxon. Their children have been our playthings, their maidens our care; their singers have been taught by us; their children's games are ours; their joys are our joys. And they forget us—they forget us!"

Once the English had loved the fairies, and relied upon their help, Oberon laments, but they no longer believe in them, a fact he blames upon the Education Act and the School Boards: "Now, all is changed. The song is no more of Robin Goodfellow and the Brownies: they tell of the poor man's suffering, the rich man's luxury. The folk are more wealthy than they were, but they are not so contented. The new songs which the poets sing are of the earth, earthy. It is time that we go."

Various other supernatural beings then appear, asking to be allowed to go with the fairies because they too are neglected and forgotten. Only the gnomes and Puck's friend Number Nip the mountain spirit allowed to accompany the court; the banshee, bogey, wraiths and others are refused.[14] The fairies then reflect regretfully on their past exploits—how they helped true lovers and abducted musicians to play at their dances—following which Puck and Queen Mab lament their current plights. Puck had been known and loved by all as Robin Goodfellow or the brownie—"I was their friend, though I played them a thousand pranks. They speak of me no more—I am forgotten." Rationality has left no space for him. Mab, meanwhile, has continued to try to bring hope and relief to people in their dreams. Now, however she must sadly admit that her role is redundant: she says to Titania, "Take my sceptre and my crown, for I am no longer Queen of Dreams."

Turning to Titania herself, she had tried to bring poetry and joy into the lives of the English people, but the queen is driven to admit that fairy poetry had disappeared from England ever since the death of Thomas Hood.

> "They believe in us no more," said the King. "We were associated with things beautiful, things weird, things kindly; but all things pass away, and we with them."
>
> "After all," said Puck, " it would be very unpleasant for us to stay here, even if they did believe in us. The smoke of the factories poisons us; there are hardly any forests where we can lurk; no rivers but are foul with refuse; hardly any
>
> commons but are enclosed by the Lord of the Manor. They've stolen

great slices of Epping Forest, and wanted to build over Hampstead Heath; and on the sea-shore are the Coast-guard."

"It is the worse for them," said Oberon. " Woe to those whom the fairies love not!… Their hearts will only grow harder when we have left the land. Knowledge will come without Wisdom, Riches without Content, Power without Greatness, and everything without Love."

"It will be the worse for the children," said Titania. "They will lose all the pretty legends which made life a romance to them. Why should they learn hard things? Why should they be taught the lesson of utility, in this iron age, so soon? Why should they not, like the brave men of old, be taught to cherish the memories of the good people? They are little chemists now, and little philosophers; little linguists, little scorners and scoffers at what they cannot

understand."[15]

Then, with the dawn, the fairies vanish. All that remains is a fairy ring, created by many tiny feet. The king and queen's coach has become a dry leaf; her globe is an acorn, her sceptre a reed; Oberon's crown is nothing but a wreath of wild flowers and Mab's wand is just a twig. The narrator concludes:

"Not altogether vain," I thought, " was the cult of the fairies—not a superstition that brought evil with it—a relic of Paganism touched with the light of the new religion, something to help us sometimes to shake off reality, and live in the ideal."

Despite this effort to sound optimistic, the late Victorian might have been justified in thinking that fairy belief had entered an irreversible decline in the face of materialism and 'progress.' Against all expectation, however, Titania and her followers enjoyed a spectacular revival during the twentieth century. The Cottingley fairy photographs are but one instance of this, but that incident was reflective of a deeper need for mystery and wonder within a Western society no longer sure of its inexorable advance towards improvement and comfort.

As the source of dreams and reassurance, the fairy queen could even manifest herself to a poet amidst the carnage and destruction of the First World War, as in Edmund Blunden's *Premature Rejoicing*, set near the shattered Thiepval Wood, part of the Somme battlefield of 1916. He is examining the scene of recent fighting through binoculars:

"There sleeps Titania (correct —the Wood is ours);

There sleeps Titania in a deep dugout,
Waking, she wonders what all the din’s about,
And smiles through her tears, and looks ahead ten years,
And sees the Wood again, and her usual Grenadiers,
All in green,
Music in the moon;
The burnt rubbish you’ve just seen
Won’t beat the Fairy Queen;”

It was against the same background of hope that Robert Graves composed his poem *Babylon*, in which he suggests the struggle to retain his belief in Oberon and Puck in the face of wisdom and reality, which—he lamented—had battered Babylon all to bits.[16]

Oberon

Most readers will be familiar with the name of Oberon as the king of fairyland. William Shakespeare is responsible for this, but he borrowed the name; he did not invent it. It derives from the early to mid-thirteenth century French romance *Huon of Bordeaux*. In that story Oberon/ Auberon appears as a magical fairy king—as well as being a dwarf who's the height of a three-year-old child as the result of an enchantment. A dwarfish fairy king was not a unique notion: the same is true of the fairy king in the English romance of *King Herla*). Auberon is a French name, an affectionate diminutive form of Aubert, which in turn is derived the Frankish/ Germanic name Alberic (to which we may compare the Anglo-Saxon Aelfric) and which means no more than 'elf rule.' In other words, this is not really a name at all, it's just a job title—'King of the Elves.'

Oberon Before the *Dream*

The faery king's name seems to have been familiar to English speakers well before its use by Shakespeare. For example, a very revealing incident concerning the collection of magical fern seed was described by the Puritan preacher Thomas Jackson in 1625:[17]

> "It was my happe since I undertook the Ministrie to question an ignorant soule… what he saw or heard when he watch't the falling of the Ferne-seed at an unseasonable and suspitious houre. Why (quoth he) … doe you think that the devil hath aught to do with that good seed? No: it is in the keeping of the King of Fayries and he, I know, will do me no harm: yet he had utterly forgotten this King's name until I remembered it unto him out of my reading of *Huon of Bordeaux.*" (i.e. the king was Oberon)

Whilst extensive literary use was made of the name, it had already penetrated into popular culture. This is clearly shown by two cases in which conjurers had sought to raise spirits on behalf of clients: in 1444 a man was pilloried in London for his attempts to contact 'Oberycom' and in 1510 a Halifax fraudster alleged that he had communicated with 'Oberion.' This same fairy 'Oberion' is found in the grimoire now called *The Book of Oberon.* This collection of practical spells and talismans is dated to about 1577; in it, a procedure is described for the conjuration of the powerful spirit Oberion, who is married to the fairy queen Mycob and has seven daughters. He is illustrated three times in the book; he is twice seen crowned and wielding a sword, whereas in the other picture, he looks very much like a genie emerging from a bottle. It is said of Oberion that "he teacheth a man knowledge in physick, and he showeth the nature of stones, herbs, and trees and of all metal."

The king's consort Mycob (or sometimes Micol) is said to appear dressed in green and is, like her husband, skilled in the use of herbs and medicines. Often invoked alongside her is another spirit who's called Titam. This name is also found written as Titem, Tytarit, Titan, Tytan, Tytar or, even, Setan and Chicam. There's a very wide range of spellings, but this spirit could clearly relate to Titania, discussed in the previous chapter. The name 'Mycob' itself, meanwhile, has been suggested to be a variant of Mab, whom we will examine later.

Given the foregoing evidence of familiarity with Oberon, it's worth

noting that a translation of the original French romance in which he featured did not appear until about 1540, when John Bourchier, Lord Berners, published his English version *Huon of Burdeuxe*. This late availability of an accessible text notwithstanding, as we can see, the story already seemed to be very well-known within the general population.

The familiarity of the fairy king's name is further confirmed by the fact that Oberon was recruited as the father of Robin Good-fellow in a succession of Stuart chapbooks. The fullest version may be found in *Robin Goodfellow —his Mad Prankes and Merry Jests*, which is dated 1628, but which doubtless reproduces established folk stories. Robin is the son of a "proper young Wench." She is visited nightly by a "hee fairy" in her chamber. At first the story is rather circumspect about this male's identity: "whether he was their king or no I know not, but surely he had great government and command in that country, as you shall heare." His status appears to be confirmed by his care for the girl after the son is born:

> "… every night his mother was supplied with necessary things that are befitting a woman in child-birth, and that in no meane manner neither; for there had shee rich imbroidered cushions, stooles, carpits, coverlets, delicate linen; then for meate shee had capons, chickins, mutton, lambe, pheasant, snite, woodcocke, partridge, quaile… wine had shee of all sorts, as muscadine, sacke, malmsie, claret, white and bastard… Sweet meates too had they in such aboundance that some of their teeth are rotten to this day and for musicke shee wanted not, or any other thing shee desired."

Very evidently, this is no ordinary father and, after many adventures and exploits, it is revealed to Robin that his father is, in fact, King Obreon. The king comes to his son with "many fayries, all attired in greene silke" and welcomes him into their company. Obreon confirms his love for his son by taking him to fairyland where he showed him "many secrets, which hee never did open to the world."

The *Ballad of Robin Goodfellow* is a rhymed version of this same life story, but adds a few additional details. From the outset, it admits that it is King Oberon, touring human houses for entertainment at night, who is attracted to the "comely lass." He seduces this "lovely damsel… so courteous, meek and mild" but she does not know his identity. The midwife who attends her son's birth suspects the truth, though, especially when the absent father supplies the new mother with "store of linen… With dainty

cates and choised fare / He served her like a lady." Robin learns of his father's true nature when he awakes one day to find a scroll beside him which promises to teach him all his parent's "mysterious skill."[18]

Oberon appeared regularly too in plays, masques and poetry. In Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, published between 1590 and 1596, he was identified with Henry VIII and was described as "mightie;" "Great was his power and glorie over all," Spenser added, flattering the late king's daughter, who by then ruled as Elizabeth I.[19] Robert Greene's *Scottish Historie of James the Fourth* (1594) features 'Oboram, King of Fayeries' as a kind of narrator or master of ceremonies. Despite his royalty, he is the little king of puppet-like subjects, who "look'st not so big as the king of Clubs." In *Lust's Dominion, or The Lascivious Queen,* a collaboration of 1600 between Dekker, Haughton and Day, Oberon has a comparable role. He appears with music and dancing fairies and foretells the fate of the heroine Maria. The fairy king was also seen in William Percy's play *The Faery Pastorall* (1603).

Shakespeare’s Oberon

Midsummer Night’s Dream is believed to have been written in 1595-96, but it did not receive its first performance until January 1st 1605. As scholar Floris de Lattre described, the fairy king’s status was about to be transformed:

> “Oberon has been removed from the world of romance, where he was still a dwarf, and brought among the tiny Teutonic elves, while Puck, on the other hand, so familiar to every country homestead, appears as Oberon’s court jester, being thus put under the fairy king’s direct subjection.”[20]

We shall consider Puck’s parallel metamorphosis in due course. Oberon’s role in Shakespeare’s play is to be ‘Captain of the fairy band’ and ‘King of shadows’ but also to be a magician, something akin to Prospero in *The Tempest.* There is, too, a suggestion that he differs in some degree from the rest of the fairies around him. When Puck warns of the imminent dawn, that will drive the spirits away, Oberon replies “we are spirits of another sort,” and as such they are able to withstand the sun’s rays.[21]

Oberon is portrayed by Shakespeare as unfaithful to his wife, enjoying affairs with humans—if not other fairies—over and above which he is cruelly vengeful, plotting to humiliate his wife by making her fall in love with “lion, bear or wolf, or bull, [or] meddling monkey [or] busy ape.” The consequences of this, though, the king appears to regret—and swiftly reverses. Oberon also has magical powers and knows the properties of herbs and charms to go with them. He can make himself invisible and he and his queen can fly through the air at astonishing speed: “We the globe can compass soon/ Swifter than the wandering moon.” Finally, Oberon has the ability to dispense health and good fortune on couples and their offspring, blessing them with nothing more than enchanted field dew.[22]

Oberon’s Later Career

Fairy kings and queens had been known in British folklore during the sixteenth century, but with the exception of Mab, they had not been named. In taking his character from *Huon of Bordeaux*, Shakespeare accelerated Oberon to the forefront of the fairy court.

Oberon was seen next in Dekker’s *Whore of Babylon* (1607), in which he featured once again as Henry VIII, father to Elizabeth I, who appeared in the guise of Titania. This role evidently owes a great deal more to Spenser than it does to Shakespeare’s relatively recently performed play. Thereafter, Oberon’s position as head of the faery court was secure. For example, two fraudsters, John and Alice West, tried to cheat a London widow of her money and goods in about 1612 and, as part of this ploy, they told the woman that Oberon had become enraged when he heard that she had spoken to others about his intended bounty towards her. The Wests’ threat to cover up their deceit coupled the well-known hatred of the fairies for a person who blabbed about their generosity with reference to what, by then, must have been the acknowledged name of the fairy monarch.[23]

In June 1610 Ben Jonson staged a masque, *Oberon the Fairy Prince*, in which the eponymous young prince was surrounded by elves, faes, nymphs and satyrs. The fact that Oberon is the husband of Queen Mab in Drayton’s *Nymphidia* (1627) would seem to reflect further his newly confirmed primacy as the pre-eminent fairy king. The role needed no longer to be fulfilled anonymously. However, Oberon does not appear favourably in this miniature epic—perhaps another inheritance from *Midsummer Night’s Dream*. He is a proud monarch who is at risk of being cuckolded and who is consumed by a jealous rage. He enjoys ‘making sport’ in human homes at night, yet at the same time he is filled with suspicion and jealously over one of his knights, Pigwiggen, whom he suspects of dallying with the queen. As a result, Oberon grows “as mad as any Hare,” becoming so “Bedlam” (mad and frantic) that he strikes out at any innocent male he comes across and plots vengeance upon his wife and her lover. The king’s anger culminates in a joust with Pigwiggen. Fortunately for all concerned, Proserpina intervenes before serious injuries are inflicted; she uses her magic to make all the parties forget their quarrel and to restore peace and harmony in Faery.

Oberon was also undisputed prince of the faeries in Thomas Randolph’s *Amyntas, or the Impossible Dowry*, written in 1632. The youthful king’s

realm is described as a utopia and he has “a stately presence,” seated upon his “throne of state.” He leads an enviably “delitious life” surrounded by milkmaids and nymphs with kisses “as sweet as sillibubs.” Yet, he is also called “Prince of Pigmies” and is portrayed being caught stealing apples from an orchard.[24] For all his regal qualities, then, Oberon is prey to the baser human emotions and his conduct can degenerate into farce. He need not be taken fully seriously.[25]

Once Oberon had been established as the unquestioned king of fairyland, authors could then proceed to make literary experiments with him, knowing that his regal status was secured. In William Browne’s *Britannia’s Pastorals* Oberon is featured enjoying a miniscule banquet,[26] a conceit that was subsequently taken up and expanded upon by Robert Herrick in a series of poems concerning “mighty Oberon,” his queen, their palace, its chapel and a feast they enjoy. Herrick leaves us in no doubt as to the splendour of the faery court (however microscopic it may be), with its elaborate buildings and its lavish entertainments. Oberon sits down to a banquet of many delicate courses washed down with dew and honey wine. What’s more:

> “… all this while his eye is serv’d,
> We must not think his eare was sterv’d.”

A consort of grasshopper, cricket, fly and gnat provide music as the king feasts. At the end of this elegant repast Oberon is “high fed/ For Lust and action” whilst the wine has worked to “bewitch/ His blood to height.” Accordingly, he is led by his courtiers to other pleasures:

> “Halfe tipsie to the Fairie Bed,
> Where Mab he finds; who there doth lie
> Not without mickle majesty.”

In the queen’s splendid and sumptuous bed chamber, Oberon is undressed by his attendants, who then discretely depart:

> “And now the bed and Mab possest,
> Of this great-little-kingly-Guest.
> We’ll nobly think, what’s to be done,
> He’ll do no doubt…”[27]

Very similar to these more famous verses is a short poem attributed to Sir Simeon Steward, *The Fairy King, or Oberon Dressing*, which was published posthumously in 1635. It depicts the monarch being dressed by his servants in clothes made from cobwebs, flies’ wings and grasses. The humour in these poems is whimsical, but we must admit that Oberon’s majesty is left as

diminished as his stature by the work of Herrick, Steward and Drayton.[28]

Since the seventeenth century, Oberon's dominion on the fairy throne has remained unchallenged. He has been kept in the public eye through a variety of media. The publication in Germany in 1780 of Christoph Martin Wieland's epic *Oberon* marked the beginning of a reinvigorated interest in his story. The poem was based on *Huon of Bordeaux* and soon generated its own adaptations and imitations. Actress Friedericke Sophie Seyler used the verses to create a *Singspiel* titled *Huon und Amande,* which in turn was copied in 1789 to form the libretto for the opera, *Oberon, König der Elfen,* by Austrian composer Paul Wranitzky. Carl Maria von Weber also used the poem, as translated by J. R. Planche, for the basis for his last opera, *Oberon—or the Elf King's Oath*, in 1826. Interestingly, its first performance at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, in London, in April of that year, was advertised with playbills that promoted its spectacular scenery. These included 'Oberon's Bower,' a 'Ravine amongst the Rocks of a Desolate Island' and a 'Perforated Cavern on the Beach,' which was seen successively with the ocean lashed by a storm, in a calm and at sunset. These sorts of elaborate production became part and parcel of faery theatre and pantomime as the subsequent decades passed.

Other operatic versions of the story include William Sotheby's *Oberon, or a Mask in Five Parts* (1803), the anonymous *The Gnome King: An Elfin Freak, or Legend of Number-Nip* (1819) and George Macfarren's *Oberon, or the Charmed Horn* (1826). Wieland's work was also adapted into a ballet, *Sire Huon*, by Michael Costa in 1834. Inspiration travelled in the opposite direction as well. Felix Mendelssohn composed music for a version of *The Dream* based upon a translation into German by August Wilhelm Schlegel and Ludwig Tieck.

King Oberon was influential in the fine arts as well. Fuseli illustrated an edition of Wieland's poem in 1795. His king in the scene *Oberon Drips Flower Sap in Sleeping Titania's Eyes* (1793-4) is a muscular monarch akin to a Greek sculpture, dressed in a short cloak with a sceptre and standing imperiously over his semi-naked queen. Puck appears in the background, looking like a masked Greek player. In 1888 Sir Noel Paton portrayed *Oberon Watching a Mermaid* in a very similar way. The fairy king is a slim, athletic youth, crowned with butterfly wings. He gazes longingly at the naked mermaid, reclining like a John Simmons fairy on a rock offshore, whilst an imp-like Puck crouches nearby, grinning mischievously to himself. He is a

boy, but with large pointed ears and furled bat wings that are leathery and black. David Scott version of this scene, which Paton must have known, but his Oberon looks more like a Greek shepherd with a robe around his waist, whilst Puck is a curious butterfly winged character.

Oberon reigned in poet Thomas Tickell's epic *Kensington Gardens* (1722) and, along with Queen Mab, in Thomas Parnell's verse *A Fairy Tale in the Ancient English Style,* published in the same year, as well as in numerous subsequent poems. We meet the king, for instance, Thomas Hood's *Plea of the Midsummer Fairies* (in which he carries a wand) and in John Keats' *The Song of the Four Fairies.*[29] He is a woodland monarch still in Alfred Noyes' *Song of Sherwood,* demonstrating how the link with the natural environment, established in *Huon of Bordeaux* and reinforced by Shakespeare, has been maintained into modern times.[30]

For Edna St Vincent Millay, in *Doubt No More* of 1921, Oberon seems to have become part and parcel of the English landscape, as he leads a fairy band "Over the indulgent land."[31] Horace Walpole writing a letter in January 1764, granted Oberon even greater dominion, gracing him with the titles of "grand [and] emperor of fairyland," so that we should not be at all surprised to meet "imperial Oberon" in William Allingham's *Prince Brightkin,* published in 1877.[32]

Oberon's reputation as a healer, or wizard, skilled with herbs, also lingered about him. Frances Greville (1724-89) addressed her *Prayer for Indifference* to the (tiny) fairy king, bidding him to:

> "haste to shed the sovereign balm,
> My shatter'd nerves new string;
> And for my guest, serenely calm,
> The nymph Indifference bring!"

She sought from the monarch tranquil days and nights of calm repose, freed from worries over herself and others.[33]

Howsoever his dominion has expanded, Oberon has never fully regained his adult dimensions. He remains miniscule, as in the verse *A Fairy Family* by Sydney Dobell (1824-74). In this, the noble prince of a "tiny band" lives under a stone, eats grass seeds and drinks milk from the drops caught in flowers beneath a cow during milking. For his leisure, the king goes sailing on a beetle's wing. An undated poem, *The Fairies' Umbrella,* included in Frances Jenkins Olcott's *Book of Elves and Fairies* describes an equally miniature monarch and his court:

“I spied King Oberon and his beauteous Queen
Attended by a nimble-footed train
Of Fairies tripping o’er the meadow’s green,
And to mewards (methought) they came amain.
I couched myself behind a bush to spy,
What would betide the noble company.
It ’gan to rain, the King and Queen they run
Under a mushroom, fretted overhead,
With glow-worms artificially done,
Resembling much the canopy of a bed
Of cloth of silver: and such glimmering light
It gave, as stars do in a frosty night.”[34]

All the standard fairy conceits (both traditional and literary) are here—dancing in green places, glow-worm lamps and mushrooms as proportionate shelters, as well as the named king.[35]

Oberon is today accepted as the archetypal fairy king and, it’s true, he clearly has some Old English roots, but he’s come to us by way of literature and is not really a true folklore figure. For the British, though, this need not really matter because they’ve had their own native fairy king all along, whose name is Arthur—as we shall discover in a later chapter.

Ariel

Ariel is *not* one of the traditional members of the British fairy clan. He is almost entirely an invention of Shakespeare for his play *The Tempest* and, in truth, it is not even clear whether or not the character is a fairy or some other sort of spirit. These uncertainties notwithstanding, the popularity of Shakespeare's characters have cemented Ariel in the public consciousness and he is most easily understood as being of the fairykind.

The character Ariel in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a distinct departure from the fairies of the playwright's earlier *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Both Ariel and Puck conjure illusions out of glamour on their masters' behalf, but in the latter play, Puck is derived straight from British folk tradition with his pranks, his earthy humour and his domestic associations. Ariel has none of these characteristics, yet he is still a "tricksy spirit." Where did Shakespeare get his inspiration? There are three separate Ariels whom we must discuss.[36]

Origins

Ariel is a Hebrew name. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa mentions in *De Occulta Philosophia* that "Ariel is the name of an angel, and is the same as the Lion of God. Sometimes it is also the name of an evil demon and of a city called Ariopolis where the idol of Ariel was worshipped."[37] The name was chosen by medieval and Renaissance magicians, and by Neo-Platonist philosophers, for one of the sylphs, a being who was sometimes said to be ruler of Africa. Sylphs are one of the four 'elementals', the spirits of the earth, air, fire and water. The sylphs are the spirits of the air and are reputed to be capricious, passionate and irascible. Their airy and aerial connections obviously suggested a fairy analogy to playwrights and poets and this Neo-Platonist being must be a likely inspiration for Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's Spirit

In *The Tempest* the spirit Ariel is enslaved by the sorcerer Prospero. He has many very typical fairy traits: he can become invisible; he can fly at incredible speed ("with a twink"), riding on the clouds and conjuring storms; he can walk on the waves and ride the sharp north wind; finally, and most importantly, he can change his shape.

As Floris de Lattre observed "Ariel himself is not without some likeness to Puck. He also is a preternatural courier and flies nimbly through the air on his master's missions. He is more refined, however… than Oberon's body-servant, though once, at least, he fairly treats himself to a Puck-like trick when his invisible interference leads to blows between Trinculo and Stephano."[38]

Ariel is a winged spirit—'delicate,' 'a bird', a 'chick,' he is 'but air.' His 'dainty' and diminutive nature is emphasised by the song he sings:

> "Where the bee sucks, there suck I:
> In a cowslip's bell I lie;
> There I couch when owls do cry.
> On the bat's back I do fly
> After summer merrily.
> Merrily, merrily shall I live now
> Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."[39]

Ariel was formerly imprisoned in a tree by a witch; from this Prospero released him—on conditions of service for a time. After a period serving Prospero well and faithfully, Ariel is ultimately released: "to the elements be free" and then is "as free as mountain winds."[40]

Ariel's relationship to wider faery kind is indicated by his diminutive size, hiding in flowers just like the fairies of *Midsummer Night's Dream.* In addition, there is his song 'Come unto these yellow sands,' which is addressed to 'sweet sprites' and which subsequent generations have certainly assumed to refer to dancing fairies: see for example the paintings by Robert Huskisson (1841) and Richard Dadd (1842) which take their title from the song. Furthermore, Ariel's association with music, song and dance in itself indicates a faery nature and his use of these to lead the plays other characters around the island is very much like 'pixie leading.'[41]

Later writers have certainly accepted Ariel's faery identity. In the poem *Ariel In The Cloven Pine* by James Bayard Taylor (1825-78), the spirit

laments his imprisoned state and compares himself to “happier elves,” whilst in her *Song of Ariel* (c.1811) Janetta Philips linked the sprite to fays, Titania and nymphs.[42]

Puck is clearly and solidly male, but Ariel is sexless (hence, in theatrical productions, the frequency with which the character is portrayed as either male or female). In contrast to Puck’s cheeky cheeriness, Ariel seems subservient and melancholy. This theme of enslavement perhaps comes from Ariel’s origins in hermetic magic: he is a familiar, a spirit to be conjured and commanded. He is there to do Prospero’s will and lacks any personality or motivation of his own. Both captive Ariel and the conjured spirit are controlled by another’s arcane knowledge and skills.

Alexander Pope

There is a second Ariel in English literature. In Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock* (1714) Ariel the sylph reappears. The poem was a mock-heroic commentary upon an actual incident, first written in 1712, and the 'machinery' of the sylphs was something of an afterthought for Pope. Nevertheless, the elementals assume an important role as guardians and attendants to the heroine. In his introductory letter to Mrs Arabella Fermor that precedes the poem, Pope states that he has drawn upon "a very new and odd Foundation, the Rosicrucian doctrine of spirits." He explains to her that, according to these gentlemen, the four elements are inhabited by spirits, the sylphs being "the best condition'd Creatures imaginable. For they say, any mortals may enjoy the most intimate Familiarities with these gentle spirits, upon a Condition very easy to all true Adepts, an inviolate preservation of Chastity."

Chastity is key to Pope's plot. In the poem, Ariel's task is to protect his mistress Belinda's virtue, but as a sylph he seems ill-suited to do this. We also learn from the poem that women can be reborn as one or other of the elementals, depending upon their characteristics during life and that:

> "The light Coquettes in Sylphs aloft repair,
> And sport and flutter in the Fields of Air."[43]

Thanks to Pope's intervention, the sylphs began to transform into the explicitly tiny fairies with insect wings that are now so familiar to us. They have 'transparent forms' and 'fluid Bodies half dissolv'd in Light.'[44]

In the event, the Ariel of Pope's poem fails to protect Belinda's virginity and a symbolic lock of her hair is snipped off by a suitor. This contrasts with the success of Ariel in *The Tempest*, who fulfils all of Prospero's commands and so earns his release. It is significant that, having failed in his duty, Pope's Ariel is replaced by Umbriel, a malignant gnome (a daemon of the earth who delights in mischief, according to the Rosicrucian doctrine).

Victorian Ariel and After

Just as *Midsummer Night's Dream* saw a revival in the Victorian theatre, so too did *The Tempest.* The play continued to be performed throughout the late seventeenth and eighteenth century, but in a heavily cut form. A production by William Charles Macready in 1838 restored the original text and a further renowned staging by Charles Kean in 1857 confirmed the popularity of the play thereafter. Interestingly, the convention in Victorian times (as in the previous century) was for a woman to play Ariel (although this was true for both Puck and Oberon as well, decisions which may seem far more surprising to us). Both Daniel Maclise and Richard James Lane R.A. painted actress Priscilla Horton as she appeared in the role in at the Theatre Royal in 1838. She is unquestionably a slender young woman in a dress, with her long hair decorated with foliage and a pair of gauzy fly wings.

The familiarity of the play to audiences inspired artists to begin to design works based upon scenes and characters from the text. The *Rape of the Lock,* meanwhile, had a rather more consistent history of illustration and from the start depictions of the sylphs were instrumental in shaping public perceptions of fairies.

The earliest artist to tackle Ariel as a subject was Henry Fuseli, who in *Belinda's Awakening* (1780-90) made the Pope's sylph a very solid and Puck-like being. He has a very robust and masculine physique and an unpleasant expression, the only gesture to effeminacy being a chaplet of flowers on his head. The same cannot be said of the work of Joseph Severn, who painted Shakespeare's Ariel twice. In the larger of the two scenes, from 1826, he is shown as a naked and very girlish boy riding a bat with a peacock feather in each hand. Severn may have drawn some inspiration from *Ariel on a Bat's Back,* exhibited by Henry Singleton at the Royal Academy in 1819, although the latter's sprite is a rather older and more athletic young man.

John Everett Millais created what is probably the most memorable painting of Ariel, showing him luring Ferdinand (1849). Ariel looks like a green haired girl with web-like green wings; s/he floats along backwards before the young man, supported by eight green goblin bats. It is one of the oddest of all Victorian fairy paintings, although John Anster Fitzgerald's *Ariel* (1858-68) is also strange. Ariel is depicted there as a sexless being with a mass of golden curls who lies on a hawthorn branch, scattering may blossom towards the observer. He has dragonfly wings and a robe that

dissolves into a mass of blossom. David Scott's much earlier *Ariel and Caliban*, from 1837, is closely comparable. The spirit floats above the deformed monster reclining on his back, long wings extended and golden hair streaming in the wind. An androgynous boy very similar to Fitzgerald's is seen again in Maud Tindal Atkinson's *Ariel* of 1915. Here the spirit, with crumpled turquoise butterfly wings, seems to hatch from the trunk of a pine tree. It is, once again, a unique vision.

A 1908 edition of the *Tempest* was illustrated by Edmund Dulac. His Ariel was another androgynous young male and he was equipped with feathered wings, making him more of an angel than a fairy. In one plate, however, he is transformed into a fearsome harpie, with eagle-like legs and claws and his arms merging into pinions. Arthur Bentley Connor painted *Prospero Releasing Ariel from the Tree* for the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford, in 1911. His sprite is another smooth figured boy, with vaguely green wings resembling those of a fly; Louis Rhead's *Ariel* is another youth in a short robe, equipped with butterfly wings but riding pensively upon a bat. In 1931 Eleanor Fortescue-Brickdale illustrated another edition of *The Tempest.* Her *Prospero and Ariel* shows the spirit finally being set free by the magician; a very thin and insubstantial Ariel in a gauzy robe seems to spring into the air, arms thrown wide at his liberation. He has dragonfly wings, as do the other pale beings around him, one of whom holds her hands to the side of her head in a gesture very reminiscent of one of the green goblins in Millais' painting.

To conclude, Arthur Rackham's 1909 vision of Ariel also stayed true to this broad trend. He depicted a delicate fairy, an androgynous naked, long-haired male, sometimes portrayed with huge butterfly wings as seen in the illustration to the text 'When Caliban was lazy and neglected his work, Ariel would come slily and pinch him,' in which Ariel hovers over a monstrous Caliban. As was his style, Rackham drew the rest of the sprites and nymphs of the island as nude pubescent females.[45]

Queen Mab

First and foremost, the queen of British Faery is Mab. She may very well be a homegrown monarch, perhaps descending ultimately from the Irish/ British goddess Medb/ Maeve. Her ancestry isn't wholly clear and it has been proposed too that she might be related to the continental queen of the fairies and witches, Lady Habundia or Dame Abonde.[46]

Whatever her origins, by the sixteenth century, when fairies appear in English literature, there is little question that Mab is queen.[47] Her centrality and ubiquity may be indicated by the fact that 'Mab-led' exists as an alternative to the better-known phrase 'pixie-led.' Just like Puck, or the Will of the Wisp, Mab could be blamed for leading travellers astray, thereby acting as an elemental fairy force. Ben Jonson knew of this tradition when he included it amongst her pastimes: "And then leads them, from her borroughs,/ Home through ponds, and water furrowes."[48]

Lusty Mab

In her passion for Bottom and her alleged affection for Theseus, the newly-crowned queen Titania inherited much of the wanton sexuality of fairies generally and especially that of Queen Mab. She was, however, a rather pale imitation of her rather more earthy predecessor. For example, in Drayton's *Nimphidia*, Mab is connected to much older images of the nocturnal succubus:

> "And Mab, his merry queen, by night
> Bestrides young folks that lie upright,
> (In elder times the mare that hight)
> Which plagues them out of measure."

The fairy queen as bringer of sexual nightmares seems to have been a longstanding aspect of her character. Shelley was later to crown her the queen of dreams in his poem *Queen Mab* and Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* (1597) openly celebrated this trait:

> "This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
> that presses them and learns them first to bear,
> making them women of good carriage."

It's pretty evident the playwright saw Mab as having a function as a sexual educator for virgins, showing them how to perform in bed and maybe even seducing them in the process. That bearing, or carriage, is not about deportment but about receiving a lover lying on top; for men, meanwhile, if they are found 'upright' at night, the queen would also straddle them and further their sexual initiation, as we've just seen.[49]

Mab was, therefore, a more traditional British figure and she was by no means eclipsed by the success of her upstart rival. Her amorous nature lies at the heart of the plot in Drayton's *Nimphidia* (1627). The queen is "faire" and she arouses the love of courtier Pigwiggen. He sends her a bracelet as a gift and invites her to meet him secretly—something she eagerly agrees to—"she by nothing might be stayde,/ For naught must her be letting." At their tryst "The Queene, bound with Loves powerfulst charme,/ Sate with Pigwiggen arme in arme," In fact, it seems matters went rather further than that, because later she is awoken by Puck's voice, a detail strongly suggestive of a post-coital slumber.

The queen was widely praised for her good looks—but then, the

irresistible charms of fairy women, and most especially their queens, were another longstanding convention of faery lore. In Thomas Randolph's *Amyntas* (dated to about 1632), Mab is described as "beauteous Empresse."[50] She also described as "joyall" but there is, as well, a hint of her reputation for infidelity.[51]

Queen of Dreams & Dairies

Mab seems to have had two traditional functions, then, as a maker of dreams and as a domestic goddess, helping or punishing maids according to their cleanliness. Shakespeare's mention of her in *Romeo and Juliet* elaborates upon the former role:

> "And, in this state, she gallops night by night
> Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
> O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight,
> O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees,
> O'er ladies ' lips, who straight on kisses dream,
> Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,
> Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are:
> Sometime she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,
> And then dreams he of smelling out a suit;
> And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail
> Tickling a parson's nose as a' lies asleep,
> Then dreams, he of another benefice:
> Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
> And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
> Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,
> Of healths five-fathom deep; and then anon
> Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,
> And being thus frighted swears a prayer or two
> And sleeps again."[52]

Thomas Randolph also made reference to her connection with dreams in his play *Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery*. Dicaeus, a priest, recalls a recent dream which seems to have been fulfilled:

> "Last night I laughed in my sleep. The queen of fairy tickled my nose with a tithe-pig's tale. I dreamt of another benefice and see how it comes about!"[53]

An anonymous poem, *The Holly Bush,* which was published in 1646, describes Mab the tyrannous fairy pinching wenches (see later), before turning to address her role in dreams:[54]

> "Some the night-mare hath prest
> With that weight on their breast,
> No returnes of their breath can passe;

But to us the tale is addle,
We can take off her saddle,
And turne out the night-mare to grasse."

It may be added that this power over dreams was also something ascribed to Robin Goodfellow/ Puck (for whom see later). In *Robin Goodfellow, his Mad Pranks* of 1628 there is reference to his influence—both benign and malign. Robin can take the form of the bellman, or nightwatchman, who cries "May you dream of your delights/ In your sleeps, see pleasing sights;" but he is also linked to the nightmare: "Now doe young wenches sleepe/ Til their dreams wake them."

Meanwhile, in her more domestic persona, Queen Mab and her fairy court not only supervised the activities of dairy maids but avidly consumed the produce those maids had slaved over. Thomas Randolph, Ben Jonson and Milton, in *L' Allegro*, all alluded to Mab's taste for such dairy products as cream and junkets. So great was this that she resorted to theft to get them if she had to or would hinder dairy production if she chose.[55]

All in all, Mab was often quite unregal in her behaviour. She got directly involved in human affairs, meddling personally with the humblest of household servants and in the most ordinary of domestic tasks. This is encapsulated in Robert Herrick's charming synopsis of the principal tenets of English fairy belief, *The Fairies:*

"If ye will with Mab find grace,
Set each platter in his place;
Rake the fire up, and get
Water in, ere sun be set.
Wash your pails and cleanse your dairies;
Sluts are loathsome to the fairies;
Sweep your house, who doth not so,
Mab will pinch her by the toe."

According to Ben Jonson, the queen also indulged in stealing human babies (leaving ladles in their stead) and in luring midwives out of their beds in their sleep.[56]

This less than queenly conduct may surprise modern readers, but it seemed to be much less remarkable at the time. Several of the women tried as suspected witches in Scotland during the same period gave confessions to their inquisitors that featured just such homely conduct from their queens of

Elfame.

Miniature Mab

Although her sexual contacts with humans very much indicate that Mab would be encountered in the form of a fully grown woman, she was subject to the miniaturisation that began to afflict all fairy queens. We see this applied to Titania in *Midsummer Night's Dream,* whom Oberon describes as sleeping on a flowery bank where "the snake throws her enamell'd skin/ Wide enough to wrap a fairy in" and whose servants creep into acorn cups to hide from the king's anger.[57] In fact, Shakespeare had already initiated this shrinkage for Mab during Mercutio's soliloquy about her in *Romeo and Juliet,* first performed in 1597:

> "O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
> She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
> In shape no bigger than an agate-stone
> On the fore-finger of an alderman,
> Drawn with a team of little atomies
> Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep;
> Her wagon-spokes made of long spiders' legs,
> The cover of the wings of grasshoppers,
> The traces of the smallest spider's web,
> The collars of the moonshine's watery beams,
> Her whip of cricket's bone, the lash of film,
> Her wagoner a small grey-coated gnat,
> Not so big as a round little worm
> Prick'd from the lazy finger of a maid;
> Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut
> Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,
> Time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers…
> … This is that very Mab
> That plats the manes of horses in the night,
> And bakes the elflocks in foul sluttish hairs,
> Which once untangled, much misfortune bodes:"

Mab here is a tiny being and also one, like many other pixies and fairies, who likes to take horses from stables at night to ride them, knotting their manes into bridles and stirrups.

Michael Drayton and Robert Herrick consolidated this miniaturising trend. In *Nimphidia* the queen travels to her lover's assignation with Pigwiggen in a cowslip flower by riding in a miniscule carriage:

"Foure nimble Gnats the Horses were,
Their Harnasses of Gossamere,
Flye Cranion her Chariottere,
Upon the Coach-box getting.
Her Chariot of a Snayles fine shell,
Which for the colours did excell:
The faire Queene Mab, becomming well,
So lively was the limming:
The seate the soft wooll of the Bee;
The cover (gallantly to see)
The wing of a pyde Butterflee,
I trowe t'was simple trimming.
The wheeles compos'd of Crickets bones,
And daintily made for the nonce,
For feare of ratling on the stones,
With Thistle-downe they shod it…"

Herrick continued this theme. In *Oberon's Palace* Mab lies on her bed as she awaits her drunken husband's arrival. She looks "as tender as a chick" as she reclines:

"Upon six plump Dandillions…
Whose woollie-bubbles seem'd to drowne
Her Mab-ship in obedient Downe."

Her bed sheets were the cauls of babies and her blankets were of finest gossamer. Another of Herrick's poems is a plea for alms addressed by *The Beggar to Mab, the Fairie Queen.* He is poor and asks for scraps from her table—an ant, a bee's abdomen or a cricket's hip, for example.

Mab’s Dominion

Even after the advent of Queen Titania, Mab’s memory continued to be celebrated. Mab, the “mistris-Faerie,” took a lead role before King James in Ben Jonson’s masque *The Satyr*, performed in June 1603; she was the fairy queen in Drayton’s *Muse’s Elizium;* she leads the fairy dancing in the little poem *The Faery Queen* that was first published in *The Mysteries of Love and Eloquence*, 1658, and for Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, she was the monarch of her fairy verses, such as *Queen Mab’s Dinner Table* or *The Pastime of the Queen of Fairies*—“There Mab is Queen of all, by Nature’s will.” This ruler is, all the same, miniature, being seated beneath a flower surrounded by the “Fairy fry” of her court.[58]

Interestingly, in his 1679 play *The History and Fall of Caius Marius*, Thomas Otway brazenly stole Mercutio’s speech from *Romeo and Juliet*, putting it in the mouth of Roman Sulpitius with only modest alterations and very much retaining Mab’s tininess. Much more recently, American poet and dramatist Richard Hovey (1864-1900) commandeered from Shakespeare not just Mab but Puck, Oberon, Titania *and* Ariel for his rather curious verse-play *The Quest of Merlin—A Prelude.*[59]

Mab’s position and popularity were not diminished for later generations —despite the enhanced profile granted to Titania.[60] Charlotte Dacre (1771-1825), perpetuated the miniscule Mab in her poem *Queen Mab and her Fays*, in which they transform themselves into flies and intervene in the dreams of human lovers. Musing upon a *Twilight Moth*, Madison Julius Cawein exclaimed:

> “Gnome-wrought of moonbeam-fluff and gossamer,
> Silent as scent, perhaps thou chariotest
> Mab or King Oberon; or, haply, her
> His queen, Titania, on some midnight quest.”

The queen is tiny, too, in Thomas Hood’s *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies*, and it follows logically that this is also her consort’s stature: “King Oberon, and all his merry crew,/ The darling puppets of Romance’s view.” Hood also described her as “stealthy Mab, queen of old realms romantic” and elsewhere as “glib,” when describing her flights around the world. Curiously, she is present in Hood’s poem alongside Queen Titania—though apparently without rancour. In Sydney Dobell’s *Snowdrops*, she ‘wings’ through the night on a moth and the daisy of the poem of that name by Eric Mackay

(1851-98) serves as “A mimic sun to light a true-love bower/ For fair Queen Mab.”

In *Halloween, 1916* by Arthur Peterson, another of the monarch’s traditional roles is recalled: “Mab who teases housewives/ If their housewifery be wrong.” She is still an entrancing beauty, too, as in Paul Dunbar’s *The Discovery:* “Queen Mab was there, her shimmering hair/ Each fairy prince’s heart’s despair.”

Against these verses faithful to the older sources, we must set Thomas Hood’s *Queen Mab,* written in about 1842. The fairy queen he presents is far closer to the twee and girly fairies, found so much in contemporary culture, than to the robust and independent Mab of former times.

> “A little fairy comes at night,
> Her eyes are blue, her hair is brown,
> With silver spots upon her wings,
> And from the moon she flutters down.
> She has a little silver wand,
> And when a good child goes to bed
> She waves her wand from right to left,
> And makes a circle round its head.
> And then it dreams of pleasant things,
> Of fountains filled with fairy fish,
> And trees that bear delicious fruit,
> And bow their branches at a wish;
> Of arbours filled with dainty scents
> From lovely flowers that never fade;
> Bright flies that glitter in the sun,
> And glow-worms shining in the shade.
> And talking birds with gifted tongues,
> For singing songs and telling tales,
> And pretty dwarfs to show the way
> Through fairy hills and fairy dales.
> But when a bad child goes to bed,
> From left to right she weaves her rings,
> And then it dreams all through the night
> Of only horrid things!
> Then lions come with glaring eyes,
> And tigers growl, a dreadful noise,

And ogres draw their cruel knives
To shed the blood of girls and boys.
Then stormy waves rush on to drown,
Or raging flames come scorching round,
Fierce dragons hover in the air,
And serpents crawl along the ground.
Then wicked children wake and weep,
And wish the long black gloom away;
But good ones love the dark, and find
The night as pleasant as the day."

Hood retained Mab's link to dreams, but they have been divorced from the adult concerns with sex, cupidity and gain; rather, this delicate butterfly fairy acts as some adjunct to parental admonishments, enforcing a code of 'good' and 'bad' behaviour in the Victorian nursery.

As with so many of the other famous fairies, of course, Mab has increasingly been reduced to a fairy tale figure fit only for childish fancies, losing much of her mature significance and force.[61] Consequent upon that diminishment and trivialisation, there has been a growing tendency towards disbelief and dismissal. American author Emma Lazarus (1849-87) expressed this in her verse *August Moon:*

"Ancient legends come to mind.
Who would marvel should he find,
In the copse or nigh the spring,
Summer fairies gambolling
Where the honey-bees do suck,
Mab and Ariel and Puck?
Ah! no modern mortal sees
Creatures delicate as these.
All the simple faith has gone
Which their world was builded on."

Despite Titania's ascendancy, Mab has also continued to appear in the visual arts. Turner exhibited *Queen Mab's Cave* in 1846, attaching to it a quotation from his own poem, *The Fallacies of Hope:* "Thy orgies, Mab, are manifold." Whatever he may have written, Turner's actual canvas is a lot less explicit. The picture is a golden sunset glow with very indistinct details; small naked figures are seen dancing and playing at the margins, but all we

see in the cave itself is a bright shimmer of light and some hints of miniscule nudes.

The vision of the queen as a highly sexual being certainly comes through in the paintings of Swiss-born Henry Fuseli (Johann Heinrich Füssli,1741-1825). His *Fairy Mab*, which was begun in 1793, is a surreal scene dominated by an adult sized queen dressed in gauzy fabrics which reveal her breasts and legs. She wears a crescent moon diadem, alluding to her connections to moon goddess Diana, and she seems to sit before a kind of lunar halo. Mab holds a bowl—presumably of milk or cream—from which she is eating with a spoon, but she pauses with her hand raised to her mouth, regarding us in a welcoming and rather seductive manner. The queen is surrounded by jugs and bowls from the dairy, as well as several other much smaller fairies. One of these has her face buried in a large bowl, another stands patiently by with her own bowl and spoon, awaiting her share of junket or such like.

Fuseli's *Queen Mab* of 1814 depicts a woman asleep on her couch. Mab is a diminutive figure in the background here, not immediately apparent; she has descended on a shaft of light, accompanied by moths and other fairy beings, and she waves her wand over the sleeper. The queen is conjuring the sleeper's dreams, and those are clearly sexual. The slumberer's shift has slipped down to reveal her breasts; to one side, on a dressing table, a tiny, naked female admires herself in the human woman's mirror, attended by another winged fae. Even more overtly sexual is the artist's *Mab Approaching Two Girls* (roughly dated 1800-20): the young women are naked in bed together, one being asleep whilst her partner admires and caresses her lover's body. Mab descends through parted curtains behind them, once again riding a beam of light. In the corner, a shadowy homunculus sits—perhaps a goblin. Such monstrosities are common in Fuseli's work, as (indeed) are erotic scenes. This particular picture forms a link between his illustrations of literature and his purely pornographic productions.

George Cruikshank, meanwhile, picked up upon the queen's role as a midwife of dreams. His *Queen Mab*, painted between 1850 and 1860, shows a tiny elfin band with flaming torches parading across a sleeper's face, an image very likely to have been derived from Shakespeare. Alfred Edward Chalon (1780-1860) was another Swiss artist who became established in Britain. His *Queen Mab* of 1827 also envisages the queen as maker of

dreams: she is reduced to a miniature figure, floating above a sleeping woman in a miniscule boat and brandishing a very large wand over her victim. As an alternative vision, in 1906 Thomas Maybank painted a very rare picture inspired by Drayton's *Nimphidia.* In this gouache Mab is seen climbing into her carriage, ready for her assignation with Pigwiggen. She is a very dainty, blonde queen, with huge filmy butterfly wings, and scarcely looks like the lusty adulteress the poem suggests.

Lastly, Arthur Rackham illustrated Mab for a 1906 edition of *Romeo and Juliet.* His two portraits of the queen show a very different woman to most of the previous depictions—she is tall, elegant and serene. She wears white, flowing robes, her long hair tied up with jewelled ropes. She is far more regal than most of the visions of the monarch we have seen.

In conclusion, one final—and rather aberrant—literary appearance of the fairy queen must be mentioned. That is her role in the 1885 book, *That Very Mab*, by May Kendall and leading folklorist Andrew Lang. This is a very curious publication, a fairy story that has almost nothing to do with fairies; rather, it is a satire of British society in the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century.

In some senses the book is a sequel or parallel to *Titania's Farewell*, which I described earlier. In that story, the fairy court left England for good. The first chapter of *That Very Mab* discovers the queen living in Samoa:

> "England she had left long ago; when the Puritans arose, the fairies vanished. When 'Tom came home from labour and Cis from milking rose,' there was now no more sound of tabor, nor 'merrily went their toes.' Tom went to the Public House or the Preaching House, and Cis—Cis waited till Tom should come home and kick her into a jelly (his toes going merrily enough at that work), or tell her she was, spiritually, in a parlous case. So, the Fairy Queen and all her court had long since fled from England, and long ago made a home in the undiscovered isles of the South. Now they all met and mingled in the throng of the Polynesian fairy folk, and, rushing down into the waters, they revelled all night on the silvery sand, in the windless dancing places of the deep."

However, the modern world catches up with the queen in her island paradise: almost simultaneously British and German colonists arrive to claim and 'civilise' Polynesia. Mab decides to come back to Britain to see if her court has any hope of returning:

> "Queen Mab found England a good deal altered. There were still

fairy circles in the grass; but they were attributed, not to fairy dances, but to unscientific farming and the absence of artificial phosphates. The country did not smell of April and May, but of brick-kilns and the manufacture of chemicals. The rivers, which she had left bright and clear, were all black and poisonous. Water for drinking purposes was therefore supplied by convoys from the Apollinaris and other foreign wells, and it was thought that, if a war broke out, the natives of England would die of thirst. This was not the only disenchantment of Queen Mab. She found that in Europe she was an anachronism. She did not know, at first, what the word meant, but the sense of it gradually dawned upon her. Now there is always something uncomfortable about being an anachronism; but still people may become accustomed to it, and even take a kind of a pride in it, if they are only anachronisms on the right side—so far in the van of the bulk of humanity, for instance, that the bulk of humanity considers them not wholly in their right minds. There must surely be a sense of superiority in knowing oneself a century or two in front of one's fellow-creatures that counterbalances the sense of solitude. Queen Mab had no such consolation. She was an anachronism hundreds of years on the wrong side; in fact, a relic of Paganism."[62]

Mab reaches Epping Forest and meets a friendly owl who offers to guide her around the England of the 1880s. They start with a few barbed words about the attitude towards the natural world shown by the day-trippers who visit the Forest:

"They always leave the corks about, and confectionery paper bags, for the next people to gaze upon who come to worship Nature: you may see them now, if you look down. I have often thought those corks, and cigar-ends, and such tokens that the British public always leaves behind it, must be symbolical of something—offerings to Nature, you know, an invariable part of the rite…

'However,' he resumed, 'it is certain that their devotion is strong, and they offer to Nature the sacrifices dearest to their own hearts, and probably dearest, therefore, to the heart of Nature. They cut their names all over her shrine, which is, I have no doubt, a welcome attention; but they do not look at her any more than they can help, for they stay where the beer is, and they are very warm, and flirt…'

'And does nobody believe in fairies?' sighed Queen Mab.

'No, or at least hardly anyone. A few of the children, perhaps, and a

very, very few grown-up people—persons who believe in Faith-healing and Esoteric Buddhism, and Thought-reading, and Arbitration, and Phonetic Spelling, can believe in anything, except what their mothers taught them on their knees. All of these are in just now.’”

A series of vignettes follow, in which Queen Mab meets various representative characters from late Victorian society: a scientist, a bishop, a democrat, an anarchist and others. The book is full of topical references and in-jokes which will mean very little to most modern readers, although they may have been very amusing and piquant at the time.

Various digs are made at contemporary scientific rationalism as well as at the effects of education. For example:

> “The professor replied that fairies were unscientific, and even unthinkable, and the divine declared that they were too heterodox even for the advanced state of modern theology, and had been condemned by several councils, which is true. And the professor ran through all the animal kingdoms and sub-kingdoms very fast, and proved quite conclusively, in a perfect cataract of polysyllables, that fairies didn’t belong to any of them.”[63]
>
> “He might have had more sense, then?’ returned Queen Mab, still ruffled. ‘He might have seen that I was a fairy. The child suspected something at once.’
>
> ‘Ah, he was an exceptional child,’ said the Owl. ‘Most of the children, nowadays, don’t believe anything. In fact, now that education is spreading so widely, I don’t suppose one of them will in ten years’ time…’
>
> ‘Tell me about the children,’ said Queen Mab. ‘I shall understand that better.’
>
> ‘They have to learn facts, facts, forever facts,’ said the Owl compassionately. ‘It makes one’s head ache to think of it…’“[64]

Later, that same ‘exceptional child,’ having attended a preparatory school for Eton, has lost all his romantic inclinations: “He said that bogies were all bosh” and he tries to bring down the fairy queen by throwing stones—and any other handy items—at the creature he mistakes for a butterfly.

As may be clear, this story is not about Mab at all; she is really just a convenient vehicle—a stranger to the land who needs to be guided around, thereby permitting extensive exposition by the Owl. Very little of the former fairy queen remains, except when she hears the music in St Paul’s Cathedral,

which declares to be like fairyland. Otherwise, she's present mostly to comment on how much things have changed (for the worse): for example, "Mab had found rows on rows of stucco houses, where she had left green fields, running brooks, and hedges white with may, on the northern side of the Strand."[65]

In conclusion, a revolution overwhelms the corrupt British state and Mab decides she had been better off back in the South Seas.

> "But Queen Mab… was fain to depart from Britain and renounce the higher civilisation. In the councils of the New Democracy she had no place. Church and State abjured her: the rising generation needed no fairies, but was content with football and cricket, 'Treasure Island,' and the Latin Grammar. Education, Philosophy, and the Philistines had made of the island she once loved well a wilderness wherein no fairy might henceforth furl its wings.
>
> She said 'good-bye' to the Owl … and went back to Samoa. But alas! Samoa, like Great Britain, was no longer any place for her. It was annexed: it was evangelised. The natives of it were going to church; they were going to Sunday School; they were going to heaven… they had no time for fairies.
>
> Queen Mab summoned her Court together in despair, and left for one of the Admiralty Islands. There, till the civilisation that dogs the steps of the old folk-lore has driven her thence—with constitutions, and microscopes, and a higher Pantheism that leaves the older Pantheism in the lurch, and other advantages of the nineteenth century—she is secure… till that lagging island too receives its chrism of intellect, and is caught up into the van of time."[66]

Very much like *Titania's Farewell, That Very Mab* ends on a resigned and regretful note, lamenting the passing of a merry, rural England free of pollution, greed and selfishness. However, as previous chapters have indicated, all was not in fact lost, despite the pessimism late Victorians might have felt about the fate of British fairy-lore. Mab, and all the other famous fairies described in this book, have remained alive in our culture—changed, and changing, perhaps, but very far from forgotten. The contraposition created in these late Victorian books between the neglect and pillaging of the natural world and the fairies has gained new relevance for us today. Likewise, society has rediscovered the need for myth, finding that rationalism and materialism alone did not seem enough.

Puck and Robin Goodfellow

Puck is, very possibly, one of the most famous fairies in the world. This is entirely down to *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the effect of which has been to promote a humble hobgoblin to superstar status. At the time that the play was performed, though, it was Robin Goodfellow who was known and loved by all. These two characters are, in reality, one, but Shakespeare's success created an apparent duality which must be examined in this chapter.

Puck in Folklore

Puck is now a fairy known to all nations, but until he was taken up by Shakespeare for *Midsummer Night's Dream*, there was no 'Puck,' but only 'pucks,' and these were just one type of hobgoblin amongst several. This much is apparent even in the *Dream*, in which reference is made to "an honest Puck" and "the Puck."[67] In the West of England, and down into the South-West, this being was well-known, whether as poake, pook, bucca or pixie. English author Thomas Churchyard, who was born in Shrewsbury in 1520, knew the species as "pretty little pogges." The puck's character was, by and large, mischievous but not malignant. He enjoyed a sort of rough humour and took considerable pleasure in discomforting humans.[68]

The original nature of the species or family called the pucks in England may perhaps be best divined by examining their Welsh cousin, the *pwca*. As a sort of domestic hob, it seems he might undertake tasks on farms such as cow-herding, in return for which he expected a conventional reward of milk and white (i.e. best quality) bread. On Aber Gwyddon farm, in Abercarn parish, Monmouthshire, the *pwca* is reported to have exercised violent revenge when the dairy maid left him cold water and a crust one day. She was beaten and showered with insults for her meanness. As is so often the case with fairy kind, they will play tricks, but object bitterly when they themselves become the target of them.[69]

A clearly related form of the *pwca* was known elsewhere in the same county of Monmouthshire. The *Trwyn Pwca* has been compared to a brownie, for he would feed cattle and clean out their sheds in wet weather. His presence (rather like that of the fynoderee on the Isle of Man) was a guarantee of prosperity. This *pwca* was most commonly seen as a handful of grass, rolling along before the wind. This may be surprising, but is not unique. The Dartmoor pixies have been described as looking like bundles of rags and certain boggarts can take on soft, rolling shapes as well.[70]

The other main manifestation of the Welsh *pwca* is as a congener of the will of the wisp. In this form he is seen as a candle-like light that leads a benighted traveller off the road and towards a precipice. At the very last moment the light will vanish and the *pwca* will leap over the cliff with a laugh, leaving his victim to struggle back to safety and the highway. It was well established in England that this was one of the habits of the pucks, as Richard Burton described in the *Anatomy of Melancholy:* "As he (they say)

that is led round about an heath with a Puck in the night."[71]

Robin Goodfellow's Life

Regionally familiar as pucks and pixies may have been, the hob that was universally known to English people during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was a being called Robin Goodfellow. He was a sort of hobgoblin or puck, but he had been distinguished from the anonymous mass of fairy with a personal name and epithet. The 'Goodfellow' label is just like the use of 'Good Neighbours' for the fairies, it is a mark of respect intended to appease a potentially powerful being—although with Robin it was also a mark of affection, as we shall see. Shakespeare was fully aware of the identity between these hobs and pucks—and that Robin was simply just a name for a puck. In the *Dream,* Puck is sometimes addressed as Robin, but the repeated usage of Puck as a term of address in the play had the perhaps unanticipated and unintentional effect of promoting this family name into a personal name, thereby displacing the traditional label.

A very strong sense of the importance of Robin Goodfellow ("otherwise called Hobgoblin") in early modern English culture may be gained from the fact that, in the early seventeenth century, two versions of his life were published, whilst several other texts traded upon his fame and his exploits.

The two 'biographies' were, firstly, the 1628 chap book *Robin Goodfellow, His Mad Pranks and Merry Jests,* a mainly prose text which incorporated a number of songs and rhymes, and which Katherine Briggs has labelled "a piece of popular journalism." Secondly, there was the *Ballad of Robin Goodfellow,* a version of the life story set out in the former book that had been edited down to its essentials in a handful of stanzas.[72] The main events of Robin's life described in both texts are as follows.

His mother was a young maid who was visited at night by a mysterious man. She discovered she was pregnant and, after the child was born, the absent father showered her and his son with gifts to ensure that the boy was well-cared for. Many suspected that this man was a fairy, but the mother would only vouchsafe that "early in the morning he would go his way, whither she knew not, he went so suddainly."

The boy is christened Robin and proves to be a naughty child. When taken out by his mother, he constantly made faces at passers-by and was the source of constant complaints. His "jeering mocks and mowes" enraged his mother, who mourned that "these prankes no breeding shewes." She threatened her "vile untutored youth" with a beating if he did not reform—

and Robin promptly ran away from her.

Robin soon found work as a tailor's apprentice and quickly became skilled in the trade, as well as working with great speed. However, his 'scoffing' temperament could not long be suppressed and when he takes his master's words far too literally, after being told to 'whip' the sleeves on a gown, the pair part company and Robin absconds again. The youth then has a dream in which his true parentage is disclosed to him: he receives a scroll that informs him that King Oberon is his father (see earlier) and that he has inherited from him his magical, fairy powers:

> "By nature, thou hast cunning shifts
> Which Ile increase with other gifts.
> Wish what thou wilt, thou shalt it have;
> And for to vex both foole and knave,
> Thou hast the power to change thy shape…"

Robin is able to change his appearance and to conjure items out of glamour. These powers are not to be used frivolously, though. Oberon counsels his son as follows:

> "See none thou harm'st but knaves and queanes,
> But love thou those that honest be,
> And helpe them in necessity."

Then, with a promise that he'll meet Oberon in fairyland in due course, Robin sets out into the world to fulfil his mission. A series of adventures and incidents follow, in which the boy enacts his father's instructions. A country fellow who is rude and abrupt is punished by Robin taking the form of a horse and dumping him in a pool. A young woman and her lover are saved from the lecherous designs of her uncle by means of Robin's ploys. A pub landlord who cheats his customers is exposed; a rapist is interrupted; a usurer is scared into becoming a generous man.

Robin repeatedly protects the vulnerable and the poor. He is also lauded for the help he gives to farmers and their labourers by breaking hemp, bolting flour, dressing flax and spinning. He works prodigiously, getting through the tasks in half the time it would take the human servants, and "hee was excellent in every thing." Moreover, he sought no reward: as with all hobs and brownies, a gift of clothes would drive him away.

However, Robin is not entirely consistent: whilst he generally defends virtue and constancy, in one incident in the *Mad Pranks* he deliberately sets out to seduce a weaver's wife and to humiliate her husband. In addition, his

mocking nature, which had revealed itself during his childhood, cannot be denied. Purely for amusement, Robin will appear as “a walking fire” to lead night-time travellers off the road; he also walks town streets at night, knocking on doors and running away, or posing as a chimney sweep and then disappearing as soon as he’s offered work. These rather vexing activities were accompanied by mildly salacious songs, full of suggestive references to maidens’ chimneys and honey pots.

Lastly, Robin attended a wedding in the guise of a fiddler and entertained the company before resorting to his usual trying tricks—he blew out the candles, kissed the pretty girls, pinched others and started fights between them and set all the men present to brawling by punching them in the dark. Lastly, when the celebration posset was served at the end of the meal, Robin changed himself into a bear and scared all the party away so he could have the drink to himself. The coarse humour of the prose life is typified by the conclusion to the wedding feast: “The feare that the guests were in did cause such a smell, that the bridegroom did call for perfumes and, instead of a posset, he was faine to make use of cold beere.” All these activities are marked by Robin’s traditional cry of “Ho! Ho! Ho!”

At last, as promised, Robin met with his father again and visited fairyland, where Oberon “did shew him many secrets, which hee never did open to the world.” In both the prose and ballad lives, Robin danced until dawn with the fairies to the sound of bagpipes played by Tom Thumb. In the prose version, however, an extra scene is included in which the fairies of Oberon’s court introduce themselves; these are Pinch, Patch, Gull, Grim and Sib and they describe how they indulge in such typical fairy exploits as punishing bad servants and stealing children. Each fairy concludes her account of herself with a short rhyme that reinforces the prevailing moral code within which Robin was seen to operate. For example, fairy Pinch sings:

> “To the good I doe no harme,
> But cover them and keepe them warme:
> Sluts and slovens doe I pinch
> And make them in their beds to winch.”

Indeed, these five faes might even be seen as manifestations of traits in Robin’s own character, expostulating in detail upon certain aspects of his behaviour.

In addition to these two life stories, we have a number of other texts dedicated to Robin Goodfellow. *The Pranks of Puck* is a song that some have

attributed to Ben Jonson. It is a brief summary of Robin's antics (further condensing what was described in the *Mad Pranks*), spoken by him in the capacity of an emissary from Oberon, sent to view the nightly sports on earth:

"What revel rout,
Is kept about
In every corner where I go,
I will o'ersee
And merry be,
And make good sport with ho, ho ho!"[73]

In lines clearly inspired by Shakespeare, Mad Robin can fly "more swift than lightning… about this airy welkin." He acts as a will of the wisp, misleading nocturnal travellers with a "counterfeited voice." He shapeshifts; he performs domestic and agricultural chores; he rewards those who see the fairies dancing but keep quiet about it; he helps the needy with interest-free loans of the sums they require. Conversely, Robin punishes lazy housemaids by pinching them and pulling them naked out of bed; he causes squabbles amongst gossips and frees animals from poachers' traps. Everything in the human world is a potential source of amusement to Robin in this account—even the swapping of changeling elves for new born babies in their cradles.

In 1613 Samuel Rowlands composed a moralistic text titled *More Knaves Yet? The Knaves of Spades and Diamonds.* This included a section on 'Ghoastes and Goblins' in which he reflected upon a fairy belief that he felt was, by then, waning.

"Amongst the rest was a Good Fellow devil,
So cal'd in kindness, cause he did no evill,
Knowne by the name of Robin (as we heare)
And that his eyes as broad as sawcers were…""

Rowlands continued by enumerating Robin's activities. He would visit homes at night, cleaning the kitchens and dairies, but punishing lazy servants. Whilst inclined to see him as a remnant of Popish superstition, the author still judged Puck favourably:

"'Twas a mad Robin that did divers pranckes,
For which with some good cheare they gave him thankes,
And that was all the kindness he expected
With gaine (it seemes) he was not much infected
But as that time is past, that Robin's gone…"

Having mourned the passing of the hobgoblin, Rowlands went on to

complain about the ‘Bad fellows’ who then infested England, burgling houses in the night and disturbing the peace.

Puck’s Pranks on Twelfth Day was published in 1655 and seems to be a late example of the genre.[74] A “mad merry company” has met together to celebrate twelfth night when “Robbin Goodfellow” appears amongst them and immediately disrupts the party. He provokes a punch-up amongst the men and pinches a woman’s buttocks, which only serves to worsen the fighting at the festivities.

This last example accentuates some of the qualities that seem to have made Robin so popular. He had an earthy sense of humour, being devoted to crude practical jokes and rough treatment. Boxed ears and dunks in ponds were as sophisticated as Robin got, but with these japes he dealt out a sort of simple, practical justice. Robin could work hard, as well as drink hard, and he liked wenches and laughter. The key aspect of his character was that he operated within a strict moral code. As it said in the *Mad Pranks,* “he [would] continually practice himself in honest mirth, never doing hurt to any that were cleanly and honest minded.” Elsewhere, we are assured that “Robin always did helpe those that suffered wrong, and never would hurt any but those that did wrong to others.”

At this point, it may be worth remarking how Robin often shared key traits of his persona with other faery beings. He would often appear as a horse to carry off miscreants, in this respect resembling various supernatural beasts such as the colt-pixy of Hampshire and Dorset, the Scottish kelpie and the Highland water-horse. We just now heard of his ‘saucer eyes,’ a feature shared with many of the black dogs that haunt the highways of England. Lastly, his ability to change his shape, becoming (amongst other things) a disabled beggar, a soldier, a young woman, a fox, a hare, an owl, a frog, a dog and a tree, associates Robin with many of the bogles, boggarts and brags of northern England. Nonetheless, this shape-shifting was one of his defining features, leading poet Edward Guilpin to refer to him as “The Proteus Robin-goodfellow of change…”[75]

Through his willingness to undertake hard physical work, his emotional sympathy with the downtrodden, and his preference for simple pleasures, Robin Goodfellow seems to have been adopted by the English working classes as a champion.

The Nature & Habits of Robin Goodfellow

The literary lives of Robin Goodfellow attest to his fame and popularity, but he was firmly embedded in English culture long before they appeared, and the details that the plays, masques and pamphlets provide about Robin confirm, or are supplemented by, a host of other sources that concern or mention him.

Robin has been called "the most famous and the most esteemed of all the spirits and supernatural beings who haunted England."[76] It will be noted that the writer here did *not* call Robin a fairy. He only really became associated with fairykind through the intervention of Shakespeare, who integrated him fully within the fairy court and deprived him of his solitary, sovereign status. Before the *Dream*, he was understood to be an independently existing sprite —and one whose exact nature was open to debate. Robin was related in some way to the nightmare and incubus (as we have just seen),[77] to the will of the wisp, to ghosts, to demons, to domestic spirits and, even, to human beings. The extent of the uncertainty about Robin's exact nature emerges at the end of the *Ballad of Robin Goodfellow,* when the narrator states:

> "Some call him Robin Goodfellow, Hobgoblin or mad Crisp,
> And some again doe terme him oft by name of Will the Wispe,
> But call him by what name you list, I have studied on my pillow,
> I think the best name he deserves, is Robin Goodfellow."

This stanza uses just a handful of the names that were applied to Robin, each implying a slightly different conception of his nature. He was also called Pug Robin, Lob-Lie-by-the-Fire, Lubbar Fiend, lubber and Hodgepoke.[78]

Some of Robin's associations have already been noted. Certainly, church influence had for some centuries been linking him with the devil. This is explicit in one manuscript that refers to "Robin, eclyped Imp of Hell or divell" and it's seen too in the role given to him in a number of plays—for example, in *Grim the Collier of Croydon,* he's called a "country-devil."[79] Robert Burton, in the *Anatomy of Melancholy,* grouped hobgoblins and Robin together as being amongst the bigger sort of terrestrial devils.[80] Furthermore, it should be noted that, in the later Middle Ages, 'pouke' was another name for Satan, so that in *Piers Plowman* Langland used "the pook's pinfold" as a synonym for Hell.[81]

Elsewhere, Robin was described as being human. He has a human mother, of course, in the two lives we have examined already. In the 1640

ballad, *A Monstrous Shape*, he is said to have been a man who was abducted by the fairy queen—just like Thomas the Rhymer, whilst in the play, *Wily Beguiled*, he's a witch's son.

Several sources describe Robin as a kind of bogie, as a bugbear or a bull-beggar. In *Wily Beguiled*, for instance, Robin declares that he'll "play the Bugbeare wheresoe'er I come." He'll don his flashing red nose and flaming face and set about scaring people like a "scarbabe" [a scarecrow] or a "Hellish Hag or damned fiend."[82] Interestingly, in Shadwell's play *The Lancashire Witches*, the character Puck is described as "an imp like a black shock"—a 'shock' or 'shug' being a supernatural beast or bogie taking the form of a black dog or similar animal.[83]

The longstanding consensus, nonetheless, was that Robin Goodfellow was a member of, or linked to, or was to be grouped with, the family of hobthrusts and hobgoblins. This was the case from at least the later fifteenth century. His relationship to the pucks and pixies was definitely known, but the detail was rather less certain: hence, for example, when George Gascoigne listed types of fairy being in his play *The Buggbears*, he enumerated "puckes, puckerels… and Robin Goodfellow." They seem to have had features in common, whilst not being identical.[84]

All in all, therefore, we may summarise Robin Goodfellow as an "honest, plain country spirit." He was not subject to any sort of authority—either of a fairy monarch nor even of a wider fairy family. He operated autonomously, behaving as he wished and going wherever he chose—but his preference was for woodlands and rural cottages and farms. As he said of himself in Jonson's play, *Love Restored*, his preferred activities were such things as shoeing wild mares and roasting robin redbreasts.

During the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when he entered the literary and historical records, it is clear that English people were absolutely convinced of the reality of Robin, an "illusion" that Reginald Scot repeatedly scorned and criticised in *The Discovery of Witchcraft*.[85] Accordingly, the details of Robin's appearance were well-established. He was a large, broad male, of "bigger bulke and voice." Because of his solid frame, he couldn't enter properties through keyholes or cracks in window panes like the fairies could—he had to go in through the door like any man.[86] He was often described as being dressed in a tight leather or calf-skin suit and his face and hands were russet in colour (like a brownie). Sometimes, though, Robin wore no garments at all—because he was so hairy. In Jonson's *Sad Shepherd* of

1641 he's called Puck Hairy; in the play *Misognus* he's likened to a "tumbling bear."[87]

Robin's character and habits were also widely known. His prevailing qualities, those which go very far to explain the popular love for him, were his pleasant disposition—his amiability, sense of humour, his love of jests and pranks—and his well-intentioned and good-natured meddling in human affairs. *Tell-Trothes New-Yeares Gift,* published in 1593, termed him a "merry mate" who corrected manners and made servants diligent. Robin liked good company and good ale, hence Thomas Churchyard, referring to him as Hodgepoke, said he "would come and drink carows." When, as we saw earlier, he was condemned as an "Imp of Hell," this was, it transpired, for the modest sins of going drinking and living an "uncivill life."[88] Robin was renowned for his laughter and his tricks; he would plague people, causing inconvenience and annoyance, perhaps, but never doing any real harm.[89]

Thomas Churchyard also called Robin a 'lout' because of his rough and robust humour. Although he was ostensibly describing Puck, Shakespeare illustrated this with his account of pulling away stools from under old women and such like. Robin was described in *The Cobler of Canterbury* as a "ruffler"—a swaggering, roistering fellow; this side of his character was further emphasised in William Haughton's play, *Grim the Collier of Croydon.* Tired of the city, Robin resolves to go into the country; he changes shape so that he can scare people as he goes and he plans to survive by stealing cream from bowls and bacon from flitches.[90]

Mad and merry pranks was what Robin was all about—most typically when he behaved in ways that blurred the lines between the hob and the Will of the Wisp. So it is that Thomas Heywood has Hobson in *If You Know Not Me* reminisce in these terms:

> "Now I remember mine old grandmother
> Would talk of fairies and hobgoblins,
> That would lead milk maids over hedge and ditch
> Make them milk their neighbours' kine
> And, ten to one, this Robin Goodfellow
> Hath led me up and down the madman's maze."[91]

Protestant divine William Tyndale used very similar words when he described how the failure to teach people how to understand the scriptures meant that the gospel could "become a maze unto them, in which they wander as in a mist, or (as we say) led by Robin Goodfellow, that they cannot

come to the right way, no, though they turn their caps…”[92]

As poet Thomas Heywood understood, Robin was also very commonly encountered as a domestic type of spirit and was closely associated with people’s homes:

> “Pugs and Hobgoblins. Their dwellings bee
> In corners of old houses least frequented…
> Robin Goodfellow some, some call them fairies.”

In Heywood’s opinion, Robin’s greatest habit was making noise, upturning furniture and utensils, and disrupting the orderly functioning of the household, undoing all the hard work done by the servants. William Tyndale reported the same, making a strange comparison: “The Pope is akin to Robin Goodfellow, who sweeps the house, washes the dishes and purges all by night; but, when day comes, there is nothing found clean.”[93]

Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, also agreed that the hobs’ presence in homes seldom brought real benefits:

> “these spirits be a dangerous band of whifflers [men of inconstant opinion], and, like our Robin Good-fellows, will play their legerdemain tricks, scudding here and there in a trice…”[94]

Most others (his likely beneficiaries) viewed Robin more benignly, and believed that he would grind corn, malt and mustard, cut wood, thresh grain, bake and brew beer, clean the house and churn butter. Thus, for Ben Jonson, he was:

> “the honest, plain country spirit and harmless… he that sweeps the hearth and the house clean, riddles for the country maid and does all the other drudgery whilst they are at hot cockles [a game] …”[95]

The fact that Robin undertook the servants’ work, so that they had leisure time to play games with their companions, doubtless contributed to his popularity amongst the labouring classes.[96]

Without doubt, Robin was consistently depicted as an extremely busy and hard-working sprite.[97] Because of his commitment to labouring at heavy chores, he was regularly described, or was seen in illustrations, carrying implements symbolic of his functions: a candle (representative of his role as a Jack o’ Lantern or Kit with the Canstick) and either a broom or flail.[98] Along with his trademark mocking laugh, his sweeping made Robin unmistakeable to contemporary readers and audiences.

We must recognise, though, that the drudgery that Robin undertook was *not* performed purely out of a kindly spirit. As Reginald Scot recorded, there

was a “standing fee” for his work, a “messe of bread and milk.”[99] Like Queen Mab, Robin had a particular taste for dairy produce and many authors alluded to this. For Ben Jonson, then, he was the epitome of the “coarse and country fairy/ That doth haunt the Hearth and Dairy.” He was often found “amongst the creame-bowles and milke-pans” keeping dairies clean and tidy and seeking only “some fresh cheese hire” in return. Thomas Churchyard also made reference to this preference:

> “Rude Robin Goodfellow, the lout,
> Would skime the milk bowls all.
> And search the cream pots too,
> For which poore milke maid weeps,
> God wot what such mad gests will doe:
> When people soundly sleeps.”[100]

Lastly, “Honest Puck” was not only a friend to dutiful domestic servants; he also, as we saw previously, was a great matchmaker, who could not resist interfering in the love affairs of humans. Shakespeare seems to have been well aware of this propensity, for in *Midsummer Night’s Dream* his Puck takes pity on the jilted Hermia, exclaiming:

> “Here she comes, curst and sad;
> Cupid is a knavish lad,
> Thus to make poor females sad.”

In reality, it was Puck, rather than Cupid, whose interventions had caused the lovers to fall out in the first place, but he also remedies the tiff.[101]

In summary, then, Robin’s jollity, his practical jokes, his sense of fairness implemented through rough justice, his work ethic, his capacity for good ale, all commended him to the English. He was well-known and well-loved, which is why Shakespeare chose to incorporate him into a play. However, in doing that, linking him with the fairies and renaming him, the playwright also initiated the decline of one of English fairy-lore’s greatest characters.

Shakespeare’s Puck

Shakespeare very probably knew about pucks from the stories he heard during his boyhood in Warwickshire. They provided him with the essentials of his character’s behaviour and abilities.

Puck is first addressed by a fairy he meets as a “lob of spirits” (another expression for a hobgoblin) but she then realises who he is—an identification he readily acknowledges. Puck’s role as jester to the court is spelled out, along with the traditional activities of the puck. He plays pranks on maids and housewives and acts like a will o’ the wisp, ‘pixie-leading’ nocturnal travellers out of their way:[102]

“*Fairy*-
Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Call’d Robin Goodfellow: are not you he
That frights the maidens of the villagery;
Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn;
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm;
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?
Those that Hobgoblin call you and sweet Puck,
You do their work, and they shall have good luck:
Are not you he?
Puck-
Thou speak’st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.
I jest to Oberon and make him smile
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal:
And sometime lurk I in a gossip’s bowl,
In very likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
And on her wither’d dewlap pour the ale.
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,
And ‘tailor’ cries, and falls into a cough;

And then the whole quire hold their hips and laugh,
And waxen in their mirth and sneeze and swear
A merrier hour was never wasted there."

It should be noted that this scene seems to imply that Puck is known to the fairies, but that is not one of them—reflecting the problems of defining his nature mentioned earlier. He is referred to here as Robin Goodfellow and, indeed, at one point in the play he even uses Robin's traditional exclamation of "Ho, Ho, Ho!"[103]

Despite the foregoing tally of his solo activities, in *Midsummer Night's Dream* Puck's function is to be a "mad spirit" who runs errands for Oberon, assisting him with his charms and plots. It seems that he has magical powers independent of those of the fairy king, but that he exercises them at the king's command. Puck can throw his voice and become invisible, he can conjure up fogs (like the Cornish pixies) and he can change the shape of others (as well as his own), as when he gives Bottom an ass's head. He can travel "swifter than the wind" or "an arrow from a Tartar's bow" and could "put a girdle round the world in forty minutes."

Unfortunately, in carrying out the king's orders, Puck mistakes his targets and creates even greater confusion and nuisance. In his responses to this, it seems to be revealed that Oberon lacks full confidence in his servant's abilities. He suspects Puck of being either negligent or of indulging wilful knaveries—although, when matters go right, the fairy king is also prepared to address his servant as 'good' and 'gentle.'

At the very close of the play, Robin also performs a theatrical role as the chorus, in which he summarises and concludes the action. Whilst doing so, though, he still affirms his essential nature. It is night time, the elves are "frolic" through the human palace and Puck has been sent "with broom before/ To sweep the dust behind the door" in order to bring good fortune to the newly wed couples.[104]

Shakespeare's Puck was so successful because he incorporated all the characteristics of Robin Goodfellow as well as many of the traits of the fairies as well. Minor White Latham has called Puck a "happy, frisky fairy," a being distinct from Robin and who eventually eclipsed him in fame.[105]

Puck & Robin After *The Dream*

Puck's fundamental nature as a hobgoblin is preserved in a number of works by Ben Jonson. In *The Devil is an Ass* of 1616 the character Pug is identical with Robin Goodfellow and plays the tricks we would expect of his kind: he stales yeast, sours cream, stops butter churning and "other dim tricks."[106] In *The Sad Shepherd* (1641) he appears as a familiar sprite called Puck-Hairy but, like the Puck of the *Dream*, he is a lackey, performing a witch's errands and dashing about a forest "like a Goblin." We may note that Puck's nature is still not fully resolved: he behaves in the same way as a goblin without actually being one.

In Drayton's *Nimphidia*, Puck is once more made subservient to Oberon —yet he is at the same time unequivocally a traditional sprite, "which most men call/ Hobgoblin," and he utters the "Ho, Ho, Ho" typical of his kind. He is reported to perform the functions assigned to him by folklore:

> "This Puck seemes but a dreaming dolt,
> Still walking like a ragged Colt,
> And oft out of a Bush doth bolt,
> Of purpose to deceive us.
> And leading us makes us to stray,
> Long Winters nights out of the way,
> And when we stick in mire and clay,
> Hob doth with laughter leave us."

These traits notwithstanding, Drayton's Puck is still at the beck and call of his master. He is ordered to fetch unfaithful Queen Mab dead or alive and to bring too her lover's head. He promises to obey with the utmost speed and devotion and there is a great danger he will succeed, especially as he is also endowed with "a sharpe and piercing sight." Luckily for the queen, the fairy Nimphidia overhears Oberon and Puck plotting and she casts a spell on the hob that terminates his diligent searching:

> "And he was caught as in a Gin;
> For as he thus was busie,
> A paine he in his Head-peece feeles,
> Against a stubbed Tree he reeles,
> And up went poore Hobgoblins heeles,
> Alas his braine was dizzie."

Despite his own magical powers, the hobgoblin is ensnared by brambles

and bogs (his own traps for unwary humans) and, roaring with rage, he alerts the queen to his proximity thereby permitting her to escape with her lover.

Separately from these developments in the character of Puck, Robin Goodfellow was going through his own transformations. Having been the servant of Oberon in the *Dream*, he too appeared more and more as a subservient character. Several playwrights also emphasised the demonic aspect of his character, making Robin a lackey of Satan and—what was worse—not a very effective one.[107] This led, in due course and perfectly logically, to him being cast as a witch's familiar. All these roles diminished the respect in which Robin was held, a trend indicated in the nicknames he was given: Pug, Pucky, Pucklin, Puckling. He became a figure of fun—no longer the life and soul of the party.[108]

As a consequence of the changes to Robin in the late seventeenth century, he virtually disappeared from popular consciousness. However, the Puck character that Shakespeare created has proved so memorable and so attractive that he has persisted into the modern age. Thomas Hood imagined meeting him in *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies.* "Quaint Puck the Antic" oddly arrives at the faery gathering along with "Robin Goodfellow, that merry swain." He is a tiny, but a jolly, soul:

> "But Puck was seated on a spider's thread,
> That hung between two branches of a briar,
> And 'gan to swing and gambol, heels o'er head,
> Like any Southwark tumbler on a wire."

As in *Midsummer Night's Dream,* his role is to be a jester, keeping spirits high. The same is true in *The Legend of Puck the Fairy* by Thomas Moore (1779-1852) and, a century later, Arthur Peterson portrayed Puck in precisely the same manner, calling him "merry wanderer" and "trickster."[109] Eugene Lee-Hamilton (1845-1907) also picked up on the idea of a diminutive Puck who could hide in hazelnut shells and described his burial by a mole and four dormice.[110]

Puck also became a favourite in the visual arts, primarily because he offered opportunities to paint faun-like beings and because his scenes promised action and humour. An early representation is by William Blake: *Oberon, Titania and Puck, with Fairies Dancing* (1785). As is typical of Blake, the king is rendered as a medieval English monarch, with long hair and beard, whilst the other figures are classical in appearance; Puck himself is a balletic youth crowned with ivy. Henry Fuseli's *Robin Goodfellow, or*

Puck, of 1787-90 looks rather more like what we might expect, he is a rather muscular and coarse male with bat wings. Sir Joshua Reynold's *Puck*, painted in 1789, was a great success when exhibited. The subject is portrayed as a plump, naked baby with pointed ears. He is sat alone in a wood, playing with flowers he's picked, but his generally infantile appearance is belied by a very mischievous expression. Daniel Maclise's *Faun and Fairies* of about 1834 might show us Reynold's Puck grown up. The faun is a muscular figure playing pan-pipes whilst naked, dancing fairies swirl around him. In 1837 Scottish painter David Scott produced a very distinctive image of *Puck Fleeing Before the Dawn*. His figure may also be derived from Reynolds': he is a nude boy with moth wings who's flying through the air with his legs hugged against his body. The use of faun or Pan-like features in some of these paintings may, in fact, reflect the lack of certainty about the true identity and appearance of Puck which I described earlier. Given his somewhat formless character, modelling him upon a classical precedent may have seemed very attractive to artists and audiences.

Richard Dadd's *Puck* of 1841 perpetuated the trend for him to be portrayed as small and childlike—in this case, he is seated upon a toadstool. Sir Noel Paton seems to have been drawn repeatedly to scenes featuring Puck in Shakespeare's play. *Puck and the Fairies* (1850) finds him relaxing with a group of mainly grotesque figures. He leans on a mushroom, a robust and not very handsome male with an incongruous pair of butterfly wings. In *Puck and Titania: A Scene from Midsummer Night's Dream,* the same rather rough and ugly male, with exaggerated donkey ears, chats with a graceful, naked queen. *Puck and the Fairy* depicts the first scene in which the fairies appear in the play, with Puck presented as a solid male figure in a red cape and hood, apparently about to molest the surprised and naked fay; she clasps her long hair about her for some kind of protection. In 1853, minor artist Edward Hopley painted *Puck and the Moth*, reverting again to a vision of a putto-like boy, wearing a flower as a cap, to represent his main subject. That said, he is using a thorn like a lance to attack the helpless insect, so he is plainly not as innocent as he seems. Lastly, another infantile Puck appears in John George Naish's *Midsummer Fairies*, exhibited in 1856; in this picture, though, the boy is shrunk to almost microscopic dimensions, permitting him to ride on a moth's back.

Paintings of Puck seems to have fallen from favour by the middle of the nineteenth century; we do not encounter him again in art until well into the

twentieth century. Arthur Rackham's Puck, drawn to illustrate a 1930 edition of the play, is another boy, this time dressed in a spotted suit with a pointy hat, and, when Peter Blake came to paint the character several decades later, he also chose to depict a young male. *Puck, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed*, which Blake started in 1969, finds Puck along with a number of tinier, winged child-fairies. They seem to be in a suburban garden and Puck is shown as a naked boy, regarding observers with a cheerful, friendly expression and (apparently) the face of early 1960s rock and roll crooner Del Shannon—doubtless a homage by Blake to one of the idols of his teens. Another study of Puck by Blake from 1988 again depicts him as a smiling boy, set against the backdrop of a large country garden.

Returning to the puck's career in literature, we find that the influence of Shakespeare—whilst pervasive—was not overpowering. The poem *Lubber Fiend* by Madison Julius Cawein (1865-1914) made it very clear that Robin's traditional character had *not* been forgotten, even in the late nineteenth century:

"In the woods, not long ago,
Met with Robin Goodfellów;
First we heard his horse-like laugh
In an ivy-bush nearby;
Then we saw him, like a calf,
Or a frisky colt, just fly
Kicking high his frantic heels,
Squealing as a scared pig squeals.
Snorting, baaing, neighing too,
Through the woods he fairly flew;
Father followed him, but he
Couldn't catch him long of limb
As a grasshopper, you see,
There's no man could capture him:
Then, besides, his colour's green,
So he's rarely ever seen.
Often when you're in the woods,
Just a-walking with your moods,
And not thinking; listening how
Still it is, right near your head
Breaks the bellow of a cow

And you drop scared nearly gone:
That’s old Robin you can’t see
‘Cause he’s coloured like a tree.
And I’ve heard he calls and calls
In the woods for help, or falls,
Like an urchin, from a tree:
You jump up and shout and run
But there’s nothing there to see;
Just a snickering as of fun
in the thicket, or somewhere,
And you’re madder than a hare.
Sometimes in dark woods a light
Flashes in your eyes, as bright
As a firefly after rain;
And your eyes are dazzled so
That you shut them look again
Nothing’s there. That’s Goodfellów,
With his jack-o’-lantern; see?
Hiding in some hollow tree.
These are pranks he plays on men
When he feels all right; but when
He is out of humour, well!
Better keep away! he’ll harm:
Leads you with a heifer’s bell,
Or horn-lantern, to some farm,
You suppose; but ‘t isn’t! no!
Some old bog in which you go.
Sometimes he’s called Puck, they say:
And it was the other day
Father read me from a book
That some people call him Lob
One who haunts the ingle-nook,
Or sits humped upon the hob
Whistling up the chimney-flue
Till the kettle whistles too.
He’s the Lubber Fiend, that sweeps
Ashes in your face and creeps

Under cracks when north winds howl;
Hides behind the closet door
And peeps at you, like an owl,
Bumps you shrieking on the floor;
And at night he rides a mare
Round your bed and everywhere.
And he teases dogs that doze
By the fire; and, I suppose,
They must see him in their dreams
When they snarl and glare o'erhead:
And it's he, or so it seems,
Tumbles children out of bed,
Wakes the house and makes a fuss;
For he's awful mischievous.
That's what I heard father say,
And I know it's true. Some day
I'm a-going to be a boy
Just like Robin; romp and shout,
And kick up my heels for joy,
And scare people round about;
Just play tricks on everyone.
Don't you think it would be fun?
Take an old cow-horn, that's harsh
As a frog that haunts the marsh,
And when folks are in their beds
Blow it at the windowsill
Till they cover up their heads;
And when all again is still,
Hear them wonder what it was
That was making all that fuss.
Or I'll make a pumpkin face;
Light, and hide it in some place
Where are bushes; and when men
Come along I'll grunt and groan
Like an old pig in its pen;
When they run I'll throw a stone,
Or just vanish; and they'll say

‘ What was that, I wonder? eh?’
It would be a lot of fun,
Wouldn’t it? to make folks run;
Jumping at them from the dark
Like a big black dog, oh my!
It would be the greatest lark!
Wonder why it is that I
Can’t grow up at once like you
And do things I’d like to do?

This entire poem is a spirited reassertion of the genuine nature of Robin. It might even be described as a modern verse rendition of the seventeenth century *Ballad of Robin Goodfellow.*

Rudyard Kipling’s *Puck of Pook Hill*, published in 1908, was a further belated assertion of the original or authentic character of Puck. The child heroes of the stories, Dan and Una, have been acting scenes from *Midsummer Night’s Dream* in a meadow near their Sussex home. It is Midsummer’s Eve and it turns out that performing that play three times in a row at that magical time of year, *and* in a field marked by a fairy ring, can have only one effect: they summon up Puck, “a small, brown, broad-shouldered, pointy-eared person with a snub nose, slanting blue eyes and a grin that ran right across his freckled face.” Kipling’s description immediately confronts us with Robin as the Tudors and Stuarts would have recognised him.

Puck’s appearance is surprising, but not alarming, as he seems a friendly fellow. All the same, he warns the pair that doing what they had just done a few hundred years earlier could have been a different matter. They were sitting at the foot of Pook’s Hill and, in the past, they would “have had all the People of the Hills out like bees in June.” Sadly, though, “the Hills are empty now, and all the People of the Hills are gone. I’m the only one left. I’m Puck, the oldest Old Thing in England, very much at your service if—if you care to have anything to do with me.” The children do care to do so, and the three quickly become friends.

Puck (who’s also called Robin Goodfellow, Nick o’ Lincoln and Lob-lie-by-the-Fire) shares the children’s picnic with them, assuring them that he has no objection to salt:

> “‘That’ll show you the sort of person I am. Some of us’—he went on, with his mouth full—‘couldn’t abide Salt, or Horse-shoes over a door, or Mountain-ash berries, or Running Water, or Cold Iron, or the

sound of Church Bells. But I'm Puck!'"

The three sit together and Puck quickly sketches out the history of the fairies in England. He explains to them that:

> "The People of the Hills have all left. I saw them come into Old England and I saw them go. Giants, trolls, kelpies, brownies, goblins, imps; wood, tree, mound, and water spirits; heath-people, hill-watchers, treasure-guards, good people, little people, pishogues, leprechauns, night-riders, pixies, nixies, gnomes, and the rest—gone, all gone! I came into England with Oak, Ash and Thorn, and when Oak, Ash and Thorn are gone I shall go too." [*There's little danger of this, though, as Puck plants acorns every autumn*.]

Puck makes clear a particular point of etiquette, nonetheless. He objects to the word 'fairy' and always says 'People of the Hills.'

> "That's how I feel about saying—that word that I don't say. Besides, what you call them are made-up things the People of the Hills have never heard of—little buzzflies with butterfly wings and gauze petticoats, and shiny stars in their hair, and a wand like a schoolteacher's cane for punishing bad boys and rewarding good ones. I know 'em!…
>
> Can you wonder that the People of the Hills don't care to be confused with that painty-winged, wand-waving, sugar-and-shake-your-head set of impostors? Butterfly wings, indeed!… Butterfly-wings! It was Magic—Magic as black as Merlin could make it… That was how it was in the old days!"

As for Puck himself, his traditional tastes remain intact: "Now, I began as I mean to go on. A bowl of porridge, a dish of milk, and a little quiet fun with the country folk in the lanes was enough for me then, as it is now. I belong here, you see, and I have been mixed up with people all my days. "

After this introduction, Puck proceeds to guide Dan and Una through a history of England. He is still the soul of England, if you like, the spirit of the land and its history and, as such, he is timeless and indestructible.[111]

Rumpelstiltskin and his Kin

Rumpelstiltskin is *not* a being of British traditional faery lore: he originates in German folklore and was popularised by the brothers Grimm. Nevertheless, he is simply a cousin to very similar faeries in the British Isles and, for this reason, I use him to denote a family of native spirits well-known in native folklore.

The Grimm’s Story

The story of Rumpelstilzchen was published by the Grimm brothers in the 1812 edition of *Children’s and Household Tales*. Its plot is as follows.

A miller boasts to the king that his daughter can spin straw into gold. The king summons the girl and shuts her in a room in a tower that is filled with straw. She is given a spinning wheel and is ordered to spin the straw into gold by the morning—or she will lose her head. The girl is in despair, but an imp-like creature appears beside her and spins the straw into gold, asking only for her necklace in return. The king is delighted with what he finds the next day, so he locks the miller’s daughter in a larger room filled with even more straw so that she can repeat the feat. The imp returns and does the spinning again, this time in exchange for a ring the girl wears. On the third day, the girl is taken to a yet larger room filled with straw; the king promises this time that he will marry her if she can convert it all to gold overnight—otherwise he will execute her. She has nothing valuable left to offer the sprite except to promise that to give him her first-born child. On the basis of this bargain, he spins the straw into gold one final time.

The king marries the miller’s daughter, but when their first child is born, the imp returns to claim his promised reward. The young queen offers him all the riches of the kingdom to preserve her baby, but he only wants the infant. Finally, the imp agrees that he will give up his claim if she can guess his name within three days.

Many attempts to guess the name fail, but on the last night the queen wanders into the woods searching for the imp and comes across him outside his cottage, where he is dancing round a fire and singing:

> “Tonight, tonight, my plans I make,
> Tomorrow, tomorrow, the baby I take.
> The queen will never win the game,
> For Rumpelstiltskin is my name.”

When the imp comes to the queen for a final time, she at first pretends to guess wrongly before finally, and triumphantly, pronouncing his name. When he realises that he has lost his bargain, Rumpelstiltskin falls into a rage and storms off without his prize.

This fairy tale has been reprinted and repeated in numerous children’s books over the last two centuries. It is almost universally familiar, but—as we’ve seen—it is an import.

British Equivalents

A number of British faery accounts pair the faeries' spinning skills with a task imposed upon a human that can be both impossible—and fatal—if it's not completed. In many of these stories (as in *Rumpelstiltskin*) it's a cruel human who sets the hopeless task and a fay who helps to complete it.

A good example of this type of tale is the story of Habetrot from the English-Scottish Borders, in which a girl must prove her female skill at the spinning wheel or face some unspecified punishment from her mother. A faery woman named Habetrot (who's been called the patron spirit of spinning) appears and assists the daughter, aided by a team of helpers including a being called Scantlie Mab, who may or may not be related in some ill-defined way to the fairy queen of that name. She is an ugly and deformed old woman, whilst the 'scant' element of her name might be indicative of her diminutive stature. As for the name Habetrot, we shall see that its final element is found in the names of many of the sprites connected to spinning stories, although its significance is uncertain: 'trot' is a dialect word for an old woman, which is highly appropriate to this story, at least. As for the first part, it may derive from 'hob' as in the goblin, it may have the connotations of 'crude' and 'rustic,' or it might be a diminutive, as in 'hobby-horse,' although all these words are ultimately linked etymologically, deriving from a single source.[112]

Unfortunately, this kind of faery assistance isn't always free and disinterested. In the Suffolk tale of *Tom Tit Tot* a girl has to spin a large quantity of yarn overnight or face beheading by the king. The imp Tom Tit Tot helps her on condition that she will belong to him—unless she can accomplish another impossible sounding task and guess his name. Fortunately, she overhears it and is saved.[113] Welsh sprites Sili-go-Dwt and Trwtyn-Tratyn, Cornish Terry-Top, Scottish Perrifool, Whuppity-Stoorie and Fittletrot are all similar characters in British folk tales in which an elf helps with spinning and demands a forfeit unless its name is guessed.[114]

Occasionally it's a faery who imposes the impossible spinning task. In one Scottish example a girl is abducted by the *sith* folk under a hillock and is told that she will be held there until she has spun all the wool in a large sack and eaten all the meal in a huge chest. Despite her diligent efforts, neither diminish, and she faces eternal confinement and labour until another captive soul tells her to rub spit on her left eyelid every morning. Doing as instructed,

she is able to reduce the wool and meal until she finally escapes.

The heroine in such stories isn't always saved and isn't always successful, though. In the case of Welsh girl Eilian, she was obliged to become the wife of a faery man and live in Faery forever after she failed to finish the large quantity of wool that he'd demanded she spin. In the Scottish ballad *The Elfin Knight* a human maid is told that the only way she has any hope of marrying the faery knight is to make him a shirt without cut or hem, shaping it without shears and sewing it without needle and thread. This impossible task is combined with a comparable counter-demand to sow and harvest a field subject to unachievable conditions. Needless to say, the shirt is never made and the girl doesn't get the boy.

A number of very characteristic fairy traits are incorporated in these stories. We find their superior skills in certain crafts—which can be conveyed to humans, but at a cost. We are reminded of the fairies' ability to listen in on and take advantage of human affairs and of their common desire to abduct and detain human victims as slaves or companions. We are warned of their magical powers to manipulate the physical world and of their tendency to exploit human necessity by driving hard bargains—deals which they always insist upon fulfilling. Lastly and, of course, must usefully, we learn of the power that derives from knowing a faery's name. If you possess that secret, you will be able to overcome and escape the creature and its powers of enchantment.

On reflection, we realise that most traditional fairies are anonymous to us —the famous fairies in this book being a distinct exception to that rule. The rest closely guard their names from humans, precisely because they are a source of power. At the same time, however, the fairies are found to be often careless at protecting the key to their superiority, meaning that they are nearly always outwitted in the end. Welsh brownie Gwarwyn-a-throt exemplifies this: he is overheard by his intended victim foolishly repeating his name to himself, gloating that it is a secret—and so he is undone. In a similar example, also from Wales, possession of the fairy maiden's name constrained her to marry the human male who discovered it.[115]

Additionally, these stories all demonstrate how verse and rhyme are commonly used by faeries to formulate their secrets.[116] Luckily for their human victims, though, the verse form seems to compel the goblin-like characters to sing their secret to themselves, meaning that they are always overheard and undone. For example:

“Little kens oor gude dame at hame,
That Whuppity Stoorie is my name!”
“Nimmy, nimmy not,
My name’s Tom Tit Tot” and,
“Little did she know
That Trwtyn Tratyn
Is my name.”

This last verse works much better in the original Welsh, reminding us too that rhythm and rhyme are essential to a good spell:

“Bychan a wydda’ hi
Mai Trwtyn-Tratyn
Yw f’enw i.”

Because of the familiarity now of the German tale of Rumpelstiltskin, the ubiquity of which has displaced all the British originals, I give the text of several of the native versions, drawn from around the British Isles, and beginning with the Suffolk dialect story of Tom Tit Trot. The sheer number of related tales indicates how significant the key themes once were to our perceptions of Faery—and how that information had to be passed on to subsequent generations.

The Story of Tom Tit Tot

Once upon a time there was a woman, and she baked five pies. When they came out of the oven, they were that overbaked the crusts were too hard to eat, so she says to her daughter:

‘Darter,’ says she, ‘put you them there pies on the shelf, and leave ‘em there a little, and they’ll come again.’ She meant, you know, the crust would get soft.

But the girl, she says to herself: ‘Well, if they’ll come again, I’ll eat ‘em now.’ And she set to work and ate ‘em all, first and last.

Well, come supper-time the woman said: ‘Go you, and get one o’ them there pies. I dare say they’ve come again now.’ The girl went and she looked, and there was nothing but the dishes. So back she came and says she: ‘Noo, they ain’t come again.’

‘Not one of ‘em?’ says the mother.

‘Not one of’ ‘em,’ says she.

‘Well, come again, or not come again,’ said the woman, ‘I’ll have one for supper.’

‘But you can’t, if they ain’t come,’ said the girl.

‘But I can,’ says she. ‘Go you, and bring the best of ‘em.’

‘Best or worst,’ says the girl, ‘I’ve ate ‘em all, and you can’t have one till that’s come again.’

Well, the woman she was done, and she took her spinning to the door to spin, and as she span she sang:

‘My darter ha’ ate five, five pies today.

My darter ha’ ate five, five pies today.’

The king was coming down the street, and he heard her sing, but what she sang he couldn’t hear, so he stopped and said:

‘What was that you were singing, my good woman?’

The woman was ashamed to let him hear what her daughter had been doing, so she sang, instead of that:

‘My darter ha’ spun five, five skeins today.

My darter ha’ spun five, five skeins today.’

‘Stars o’ mine!’ said the king, ‘I never heard tell of anyone that could do that.’ Then he said: ‘Look you here, I want a wife, and I’ll marry your daughter. But look you here,’ says he, ‘eleven months out of the year she shall have all she likes to eat, and all the gowns she likes to get, and all the

company she likes to keep; but the last month of the year she'll have to spin five skeins every day, and if she don't I shall kill her.'

'All right,' says the woman; for she thought what a grand marriage that was. And as for the five skeins, when the time came, there'd be plenty of ways of getting out of it, and likeliest, he'd have forgotten all about it.

Well, so they were married. And for eleven months the girl had all she liked to eat, and all the gowns she liked to get, and all the company she liked to keep. But, when the time was getting over, she began to think about the skeins and to wonder if he had 'em in mind. But not one word did he say about 'em, and she thought he'd wholly forgotten 'em.

However, the last day of the last month he takes her to a room she'd never set eyes on before. There was nothing in it but a spinning-wheel and a stool. And says he: 'Now, my dear, here you'll be shut in tomorrow with some victuals and some flax, and if you haven't spun five skeins by the night, your head'll go off.' And away he went about his business.

Well, she was that frightened, she'd always been such a gatless girl, that she didn't so much as know how to spin, and what was she to do tomorrow with no one to come nigh her to help her? She sate down on a stool in the kitchen, and law! how she did cry! However, all of a sudden, she heard a sort of a knocking low down on the door. She upped and oped it, and what should she see but a small little black thing with a long tail. That looked up at her right curious, and that said:

'What are you a-crying for?'

'What's that to you?' says she.

'Never you mind,' that said, 'but tell me what you're a-crying for.'

'That won't do me no good if I do,' says she.

'You don't know that,' that said, and twirled that's tail round.

'Well,' says she, 'that won't do no harm, if that don't do no good,' and she upped and told about the pies, and the skeins, and everything.

'This is what I'll do,' says the little black thing. 'I'll come to your window every morning and take the flax and bring it spun at night.'

'What's your pay?' says she.

That looked out of the corner of that's eyes, and that said:

'I'll give you three guesses every night to guess my name, and if you haven't guessed it before the month's up you shall be mine.'

Well, she thought, she'd be sure to guess that's name before the month was up. 'All right,' says she, 'I agree.'

‘All right,’ that says, and law! how that twirled that’s tail.

Well, the next day, her husband took her into the room, and there was the flax and the day’s food.

‘Now, there’s the flax,’ says he, ‘and if that ain’t spun up this night, off goes your head.’ And then he went out and locked the door.

He’d hardly gone, when there was a knocking against the window. She upped and she opened it, and there sure enough was the little old thing sitting on the ledge.

‘Where’s the flax?’ says he.

‘Here it be,’ says she. And she gave it to him.

Well, come the evening a knocking came again to the window. She upped and she opened it, and there was the little old thing with five skeins of flax on his arm.

‘Here it be,’ says he, and he gave it to her.

‘Now, what’s my name?’ says he.

‘What, is that Bill?’ says she.

‘Noo, that ain’t,’ says he, and he twirled his tail. ‘Is that Ned?’ says she.

‘Noo, that ain’t,’ says he, and he twirled his tail. ‘Well, is that Mark?’ says she.

‘Noo, that ain’t,’ says he, and he twirled his tail harder, and away he flew.

Well, when her husband came in, there were the five skeins ready for him. ‘I see I shan’t have to kill you tonight, my dear,’ says he; ‘you’ll have your food and your flax in the morning,’ says he, and away he goes.

Well, every day the flax and the food were brought, and every day that there little black impet used to come mornings and evenings. And all the day the girl sate trying to think of names to say to it when it came at night. But she never hit on the right one. And as it got towards the end of the month, the impet began to look so maliceful, and that twirled that’s tail faster and faster each time she gave a guess.

At last it came to the last day but one. The impet came at night along with the five skeins, and that said:

‘What, ain’t you got my name yet?’

‘Is that Nicodemus?’ says she.

‘Noo, ‘t ain’t,’ that says.

‘Is that Sammle?’ says she.

‘Noo, ‘t ain’t,’ that says.

‘A-well, is that Methusalem?’ says she.

‘Noo, ‘t ain’t that neither,’ that says.

Then that looks at her with that’s eyes like a coal of fire, and that says: ‘Woman, there’s only tomorrow night, and then you’ll be mine!’ And away it flew. Well, she felt that horrid. However, she heard the king coming along the passage. In he came, and when he sees the five skeins, he says, says he:

‘Well, my dear,’ says he. ‘I don’t see but what you’ll have your skeins ready tomorrow night as well, and as I reckon I shan’t have to kill you, I’ll have supper in here tonight.’ So they brought supper, and another stool for him, and down the two sate.

Well, he hadn’t eaten but a mouthful or so, when he stops and begins to laugh.

‘What is it?’ says she.

‘A-why,’ says he, ‘I was out a-hunting today, and I got away to a place in the wood I’d never seen before. And there was an old chalk-pit. And I heard a kind of a sort of humming. So I got off my hobby, and I went right quiet to the pit, and I looked down. Well, what should there be but the funniest little black thing you ever set eyes on. And what was that doing, but that had a little spinning-wheel, and that was spinning wonderful fast, and twirling that’s tail. And as that span that sang:

‘Nimmy nimmy not
My name’s Tom Tit Tot.’

Well, when the girl heard this, she felt as if she could have jumped out of her skin for joy, but she didn’t say a word.

Next day that there little thing looked so maliceful when he came for the flax. And when night came she heard that knocking against the window panes. She oped the window, and that come right in on the ledge. That was grinning from ear to ear, and Oo! that’s tail was twirling round so fast.

‘What’s my name?’ that says, as that gave her the skeins.

‘Is that Solomon?’ she says, pretending to be afeard.

‘Noo, ‘tain’t,’ that says, and that came further into the room.

‘Well, is that Zebedee?’ says she again.

‘Noo, ‘tain’t,’ says the impet. And then that laughed and twirled that’s tail till you couldn’t hardly see it.

‘Take time, woman,’ that says; ‘next guess, and you’re mine.’ And that stretched out that’s black hands at her.

Well, she backed a step or two, and she looked at it, and then she laughed out, and says she, pointing her finger at it:

‘Nimmy nimmy not
Your name’s Tom Tit Tot.’

Well, when that heard her, that gave an awful shriek and away that flew into the dark, and she never saw it any more.

Welsh Stories

Folklorist John Rhys recorded several fragmentary Welsh versions of the story of the fairy helper with the hidden name. He also endeavoured to make some sense of the names that these goblins tried to hide.

The story of Sili Go Dwt concerns a farmer's wife of Llaniestyn parish on the Lleyn peninsula in Gwynedd. This old woman was frequently visited by a fairy who used to borrow baking implements from her. The fairy was always given what she asked for and she always returned them with a loaf in thanks. However, one day she came to ask for the loan of the woman's wheel for spinning flax. When handing her this, the farmer's wife wished to know her visitor's name, given that she came so often, but the fairy refused to tell her. However, she was watched at her spinning, and was overheard singing to the whir of the wheel:

> *"Bychan a wydda' hi*
> *Mai Sìli go Dwt*
> *Yw f'enw I*".
> "Little did she know
> That Sili go Dwt
> Is my name."

The sprite here is a female fairy, rather than the male goblin of *Tom Tit Trot* and the Grimm's version. Spinning is again involved, although in this version no undertaking to do it for the farmer's wife is recorded and the spying on the fairy is simply a matter of curiosity rather than a question of life or death.[117]

Professor Rhys speculated that the fairy woman's name had been borrowed from English and that it meant the sprite who was 'somewhat tidy or natty'—the Welsh appropriating their word *twt* to make sense of English 'tot' as Tom Tit Tot. There are other Welsh stories in which the fairy names derive from 'trot' or 'trut,' as with Trwtyn-Tratyn, which Rhys notes seems to be a male name, as is the Irish fairy Trit-a-Trot.[118]

To illustrate the more typical strand of tales, in which possession of the name is a vital, Rhys told a Monmouthshire story of a brownie-type being that was driven away from a farm by poor or disrespectful treatment at the hands of one of the maid servants. The brownie went to a nearby farm where he was much better treated, and where, in return, he undertook many different chores, including spinning yarn. The maid at the new farm wanted the spirit

to appear to her or reveal his name, both of which he refused to do. One evening, though, she pretended to go out and then listened at the door as he was spinning:

Hi wardda'n iawn pe gwypa hi,
Taw Gwarwyn-a-throt yw'm enw i.
How she would laugh, did she know
That Gwarwyn-a-throt is my name!

As soon as she revealed that she knew his secret, the brownie abandoned his work and disappeared forever. Rhys again speculates about the meaning of the name, suggesting that it translates as 'white-necked with a trot.' The last element has no sense in Welsh and it could well be a borrowing of the English 'trot,' old woman.

There's also a variant of this type of Welsh story that features a sprite called Sili Ffrit. Once again, this name seems to be English in origin, being 'Silly Frit.' This simply means a silly sprite or apparition, using 'silly' in the same manner as the 'seelie court' of Scottish fairies. In this context, the word means 'lucky' or 'happy;' it is in part a euphemism to enable people to avoid saying 'fairy,' but it also acknowledges the different status of the faery folk.

Whuppity Stoorie

This is a Scottish take on the ‘secret name’ story, although the version reproduced here is taken from John Rhys, because he translated a lot of the more difficult or unfamiliar Scots dialect of Chambers’ original.

“A farmer from Kittlerumpit disappeared, perhaps joining the army, and his wife was left alone with next to nothing to live on. She had very scant resources—and a baby boy at her breast. All her neighbours said they were sorry for her; but nobody helped her—which is a sadly common situation. Howsoever, the goodwife had a sow, and that was her only consolation; for the sow was soon to farrow, and she hoped for a good litter.

However, we all know hope is fallacious. One day the woman went to the sty to fill the sow’s trough and there she found the sow lying on her back, grunting and groaning, and ready to give up the ghost.

This was a fresh and serious blow to the poor woman and she sat down on the knocking-stone, with her bairn on her knee, and cried sorer than ever she did for the loss of her own goodman [husband].[119]

Now, the cottage of Kittlerumpit was built on a brae, with a large fir-wood behind it, of which you may hear more ere we go far on. So the goodwife, when she was wiping her eyes, chanced to look down the brae; and what did she see but an old woman, almost like a lady, coming slowly up the road. She was dressed in green, all except for a short white apron and a black velvet hood, and a steeple-crowned beaver hat on her head. She had a long walking-staff, as long as herself, in her hand—the sort of staff that old men and old women helped themselves with long ago, but which no-one carried any longer.

When the goodwife saw the green gentlewoman near her, she rose and made a curtsy; and “Madam,” quoth she, weeping, “I am one of the most misfortunate women alive.”

“I don’t wish to hear pipers’ news and fiddlers’ tales, goodwife,” quoth the green woman. “I know you have lost your goodman—we had worse losses at the [battle of] Sheriff Muir [during the Jacobite rebellion in 1715] and I know that your sow is unco sick. Now what will you give me if I cure her?”

“Anything your ladyship’s madam likes,” quoth the witless goodwife, never guessing whom she had to deal with.

“Let us wet thumbs on that bargain,” quoth the green woman—so thumbs

were wetted, I warrant you; and into the sty madam marches. She looked at the sow with a long stare, and then began to mutter to herself what the goodwife couldn't well understand; but she said it sounded like-

Pitter patter,
Holy Water.[120]

Then the woman in green took out of her pocket a wee bottle, with something like oil in it, and she rubbed the sow with it above the snout, behind the ears, and on the tip of the tail. "Get up, beast," quoth the green woman. This was no sooner said than done: up jumped the sow with a grunt, and away to her trough for her breakfast.

The goodwife of Kittlerumpit was a joyful goodwife now, and would have kissed the very hem of the green woman's gown-tail; but she wouldn't let her. "I am not so fond of ceremonies," quoth she; "but now that I have righted your sick beast, let us end our settled bargain. You will not find me an unreasonable, greedy body—I like ever to do a good turn for a small reward: all I ask, and will have, is that baby boy at your bosom."

The goodwife of Kittlerumpit, who now knew her customer, gave a shrill cry like a stuck swine. The green woman was a fairy, no doubt; so she prayed, and cried, and begged, and scolded; but none of it did any good. "You may spare your din," quoth the fairy, "screaming as if I was as deaf as a door-nail; but this I'll let you know—I cannot, by the law we live under, take your bairn till the third day; and not then, if you can tell me my right name." So, madam goes away round the pig-sty end, and the goodwife falls down in a swoon behind the knocking-stone.[121]

Ah well, the goodwife of Kittlerumpit could not sleep any that night for crying, and all the next day the same, cuddling her bairn till she nearly squeezed its breath out; but on the second day she decided to take a walk in the wood I told you of; so with the bairn in her arms, she set out, and went far in amongst the trees, where there was an old quarry-hole, grown over with grass, and with a bonny spring well in the middle of it. Before she came very near, she heard the whirring of a flax wheel, and a voice singing a song; so the woman crept quietly among the bushes, and peeped over the brow of the quarry; and what did she see but the green fairy tearing away at her wheel, and singing like any precentor:

Little kens our guid dame at hame,
That Whuppity Stoorie is my name.

"Ha, ha!" thought the woman, "I've got the mason's word at last; the

devil give them joy that told it!” So, she went home far lighter than she came out, as you may well guess, and laughing like a madcap with the thought of cheating the old green fairy.

Ah well, you must know that this goodwife was a jocose woman, and ever merry when her heart was not very sorely overladen. So she thought to have some sport with the fairy; and at the appointed time she put the bairn behind the knocking-stone, and sat on the stone herself. Then she pulled her cap over her left ear and twisted her mouth on the other side, as if she were weeping; and an ugly face she made, you may be sure. She hadn’t long to wait, for up the brae climbed the green fairy, neither lame nor lazy, and long ere she got near the knocking-stone she screamed out—“Goodwife of Kittlerumpit, you know well what I come for—stand and deliver!”

The woman pretended to cry even harder than before, and wrung her hands, and fell on her knees, with “Och, sweet madam mistress, spare my only bairn, and take the wretched sow!”

“The devil take the sow, for my part,” quoth the fairy; “I come not here for swine’s flesh. Don’t be contramawcious, huzzy, but give me the child instantly!”

“Ochone, dear lady mine,” quoth the crying goodwife; “forgo my poor bairn, and take me myself!”[122]

“The devil is in the daft jade,” quoth the fairy, looking like the far end of a fiddle; “I’ll bet she is clean demented. Who in all the earthly world, with half an eye in his head, would ever meddle with the likes of thee?”

I reckon this set up the woman of Kittlerumpit’s bristle: for though she had two blear eyes and a long red nose besides, she thought herself as bonny as the best of them. So she sprung off her knees, set the top of her cap straight, and with her two hands folded before her, she made a curtsy down to the ground, and, “In troth, fair madam,” quoth she, “I might have had the wit to know that the likes of me is not fit to tie the worst shoe-strings of the high and mighty princess, Whuppity Stoorie.”

If a flash of gunpowder had come out of the ground it couldn’t have made the fairy leap higher than she did; then down she came again plump on her shoe-heels; and whirling round, she ran down the brae, screeching for rage, like an owl chased by the witches.

The goodwife of Kittlerumpit laughed till she was like to split; then she took up her bairn and went into her house, singing to it all the way:

“A goo and a gitty, my bonny wee tyke,

Ye’se noo ha’e your four-oories;
Sin’ we’ve gien Nick a bane to pyke,
Wi’ his wheels and his Whuppity Stoories.”[123]

In conclusion to the story of Whuppity Story, we may note that Robert Chambers suggested that the fairy’s name came from the word ‘whip’ combined with the Scots word for dust whirlwind, a known method of fairy travel.

Finally, John Rhys appended to this another Scottish story, from Mochdrum in Wigtownshire. “A wife was in great distress, because her husband kept giving her large amounts of flax to spin with very short deadlines, so that the work was beyond human power. A fairy came to her rescue, taking the flax away and promising to bring it back spun by the date set, provided the woman could tell the fairy’s name. The woman’s distress was then as great as before, but the fairy was overheard saying as she spun, ‘Little does the guidwife wot, my name is Marget Tot.’ So, the woman got her flax returned spun by the day; and the fairy went up the chimney in a blaze of fire as the result of rage and disappointment.”[124]

In summary, a key figure in fairyland has always been the dangerous individual who offers help—at too high a price. We are warned repeatedly of the perils of entering into bargains with fairies, even where this may be justified by the considerable craft skills they offer and the sanction that the human otherwise faces. Fortunately, though, with luck and wisdom the unfortunate humans can discover the knowledge that redresses the balance and saves their skin.

King Arthur

Readers might be surprised to find Arthur included in a list of faery characters. He is, it might be supposed, more properly a king of legend rather than of fairy tale. However, such is Arthur’s fame that he has transcended boundaries. King Arthur long ago ceased to be merely a Dark Age hero or monarch of the Round Table: he was transformed into a supernatural being and a resident of Faery.

Foundations of the Myth

According to the several versions of the story, after Arthur was mortally wounded fighting his nephew Mordred, he was carried away to Avalon to be healed by the fay maidens Morgan and Nimue. From this myth of fairy salvation, a closer link to fairy nature evolved—and this at a very early date, well before the legends became internationally famous.

The starting point for these developments in the story of Arthur seems to have been the very early awareness that his place of burial was unknown. An old Welsh poem called *Y Beddau* (The Graves) recites where many kings and heroes were buried, but it concludes, enigmatically, "*Anoeth bid bet y Arthur*"—"The grave of Arthur is a mystery."[125] If the great national hero had no known resting place, the scope for speculation about his fate was obvious and we know for certain that it took place. For example, some canons from Laon in France made a fundraising visit to England in 1113. They toured the country and, at Bodmin in Cornwall, got into a violent dispute with a local over the lost king. The author of the record of this incident, Hermann of Tournai, observed "Just as the Bretons are wont to wrangle with the French on behalf of King Arthur," so the man in Bodmin insisted vehemently that Arthur was still alive.[126]

Arthur had achieved some sort of immortality, reports of which were in very active circulation during the twelfth century. William of Malmesbury wrote a history of the kingdom of England in 1125, noting that "The tomb of Arthur is nowhere to be seen, whence ancient ditties fable that he is yet to come." In 1155, another historian, Wace, recorded the widespread belief that Arthur:

> "is yet in Avalon, awaited by the Britons; for, as they say and deem, he will return from whence he went and live again. Master Wace cannot add more to what was said by Merlin. He said that Arthur's end should be hidden in doubtfulness. Merlin spoke truly. Men have ever doubted and, as I am persuaded, ever will doubt whether he is alive or dead."

Of course, some would argue that this 'fable' should have been dismissed once and for all as fantasy in 1190, when the alleged tomb of Arthur and Guinevere was 'discovered' at Glastonbury Abbey. This was, though, plainly a fake: the bodies were marked by a lead cross stating that the king and queen had been buried "in the Isle of Avalon," as if anyone attending the burial or visiting the sepulchre subsequently might not have known where they were…

[127]

Discovered tombs notwithstanding, Arthur was immortal and he was not to be suppressed. In his history of England called the *Brut*, which dates to around 1190, the monk Layamon added an important new layer to this persistent story:

> "*Bruttes ileveð ȝete þat he beon on live,*
> *And wunnien in Avalun mid fairest alre alfen…*"
> "The British believe yet that he is alive,
> And dwells in Avalon with the fairest of all the elves."

In the thirteenth century French romance of *Huon of Bordeaux*, Arthur even succeeds King Oberon to the fairy throne. Historian Raphael Holinshed, in 1578, told much the same story. He reported that Britons still "fantasticallie doo descant and report wonders" about Arthur. He mocked the entire myth, whether there had ever been such a king as well as the notion that he might return to rule again. Nevertheless, he revealed that Layamon's vision of the hero's fate was still current: "King Arthur was not dead, but carried away by the fairies into some pleasant place…"[128]

Poet John Lydgate in the fifteenth century had developed this aspect of the story even further, though, and had the fairy king return to rule us:

> "He is a king y-crowned in Faërie,
> With his sceptre and pall, and with his regalty,
> Shalle resort, as lord and sovereigne,
> Out of Faërie and reign in Bretaine,
> And repair again the oulde Rounde table."[129]

The *Morte d'Arthur*, published by Thomas Malory in 1485, is one of the most influential versions of the legend. The author preferred not to commit himself upon the king's fate: "Thus of King Arthur I find no more written in my copy of the certainty of his death;" after he sailed away with Morgan and Nimue, "More of the death of King Arthur, I could never find." A body had been buried, he said, "but yet the hermit knew not of a certain that it was verily the body of King Arthur." Lastly—

> "Some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of our lord Jesus Christ gone into another place, and men say that he will come again and he shall win the holy cross. I will not say it shall be so, but rather I will say—here in this world he changed his life. But many men say that written on his tomb is this verse: *Hic jacet Arthurus, rex quondam, rexque futurus* [Here lies

Arthur, the once and future king].”[130]

This was, of course, all very odd as a conclusion to a book called ‘The Death of Arthur.’ Malory was not prepared to dismiss completely the very longstanding belief in the king’s altered state and his potential return. This may have been because he wished to believe the stories, because he did not wish to upset those of his readers who treasured that myth or, perhaps, because it simply provided a good ‘cliff hanger’ ending to his epic. Whatever Malory’s reasons, the mystery of Arthur’s death or transformation were perpetuated for future generations.

By being taken to Faery, Arthur (perhaps by consuming the food and drink there) had become immortal himself and now awaits the call to return to save his former kingdom. So, our saviour Arthur was believed to sleep on with the fairies in many places around Britain: under Arthur’s Seat, Edinburgh, in Wales at Craig-y-Ddinas, Ogo’r Dinas, and Pumsaint near Lampeter, and, in England, at Sewingshields, Richmond and Cadbury, to name but a of the few locations.

In fact, fairy glamour quickly enveloped the king completely. According to the romance *Brut de la Montaigne*, all fairy haunted places belong to Arthur,[131] whilst in Gerbert’s *Romance of Percival*, the ‘siege perilous’ at the Round Table was bestowed upon Arthur by “*la fée de la roche menor*” (the fairy of the menhir). Many of the knights of his court too, such as Gawain and Lancelot, have fairy origins: Lancelot, for example, is raised by the mere-maid, the Lady of the Lake. Chaucer, in the *Squire’s Tale*, described for his audiences—

> “That Gawain with olde curtesie
> Though he were come agen out of faerie.”

What’s more, the time of Arthur’s rule began to be seen as one especially favourable to the fairy presence in Britain, during which, far and wide, they danced openly in pastures and meadows. Thus, in his version of Chaucer’s *The Wife of Bath—Her Tale*, John Dryden invoked memories of how:

> “In days of old, when Arthur fill’d the throne,
> Whose acts and fame to foreign lands were blown,
> The king of elves and tiny fairy queen
> Gambolled on heaths and danced on every green.”

Thomas Parnell (1679-1718), in *A Fairy Tale in the Ancient English Style*, similarly sought to revive a golden age “In Britain’s isle, and Arthur’s days,/ When midnight fairies danced the maze.”

Arthur, Victoria and Merry England

"They told me in their shadowy phrase,
Caught from a tale gone by,
That Arthur, King of Cornish praise,
Died not, and would not die.

Dreams they had, that in fairy bowers
Their living warrior lies,
Or wears a garland of the flowers
That grow in Paradise."[132]

During the nineteenth century, Arthur came to lie at the heart of English culture. The fascination of poets and painters with the many aspects and personalities of his story can be seen as part of a wider revival of interest in Gothic and Old English materials. To name but a handful, the poets Alfred Tennyson and William Morris and the Pre-Raphaelite movement found profound inspiration in the romances, most especially in the pages of Malory. In his *Idylls of the King*, Lord Tennyson renewed our hopes of a supernatural national saviour, confirming how the Fairy Queen would-

"… come to take the King to Fairyland,
For some do hold our Arthur cannot die,
But that he passes into Fairyland."[133]

Later English poet Philip James Bailey (1816-1902) took the medieval associations with Arthur even further in his epic verse *A Spiritual Legend*. He conjured up "fairy Avalon, still where Arthur rules,/ Sole as the sun in heaven his shining shrine;" his island of Britain, meanwhile, was a mystical landscape of moors:

"With cromlech crowned, gray cairn, or fairy knoll;
Or lithic dance of giants 'neath the moon;"

These ancient sites, what's more, are scented with wild flowers:

"all good spirits love perfumes
With many an odorous plant, both hill and vale;
Angelica, and honeyed melilot;
Day's-eye and king-cup; fairy foxglove, fern;
And violet…"

Arthur here is woven into a dense mythology of megalithic mystery, the British landscape and its supernatural denizens, becoming a spirit of place, a

genius loci, as well as a hero and fairy monarch.

The conjunction of fairy stories and Arthurian myths still remains compelling to us now, precisely because it combines magic and mystery along with a promise of redemption and restoration. The once and future king will return from Faery to assist us in our greatest struggle and to ensure our salvation. The exact nature of our ‘hour of need’ is undefined, but this leaves it mutable, ever adaptable and perpetually to be fulfilled. Arthur’s restoration is our abiding hope and in a contemporary eschatology has attached itself to the ecological crisis.

Nimue and Merlin

The Arthurian myths are full of powerful females, some mortal, some of fairy origin. Guinevere and Morgan le Fay are humans, although Morgan has studied magic deeply and is ‘fay’ in the sense of being an enchantress. In contrast, the Lady of the Lake, protector of Sir Launcelot and provider of Excalibur, and the beauteous Nimue are both supernatural beings. Indeed, in many respects the Lady of the Lake seems identical with Nimue/ Niniane/ Viviane. Both are fairy women with magical powers who operate mysteriously on the fringes of the stories of Arthur’s court.[134] However, the latter character has evolved to become the better known of the pair. This was because she came to be more distinctly modelled by writers and because she was accused, in particular, of treacherously seducing and imprisoning Arthur’s wizard Merlin, an act which helped precipitate end of the entire golden age of Arthur’s reign.

Older Accounts

The story of Merlin and Nimue can be briefly outlined. Successive authors have embroidered these basics, but the core is simple and short.

Malory described how Merlin "fel in a dotage on the damosel" Nimue, who flattered and charmed him, not because she felt any affection for the old wizard, but because she desired his arcane knowledge. He, though, "was so sore assotted upon her that he might not be from her." When this "damosel of the lake" left the court, Merlin followed her.[135]

In *Polyolbion* Michael Drayton described what followed almost inevitably from the elderly magician's sad obsession. He described how Merlin,

> "by loving of an elf,
> For all his wondrous skills was cozened of himself:
> For, walking with his Fay, her to the rock he brought
> In which he oft his nigromancies wrought.
> And going in thereat, his magics to have shown,
> She stopt the cavern's mouth with an enchanted stone,
> Whose cunning strongly crossed, amazed while he did stand,
> She captive him conveyed unto Fairyland."[136]

These are the essential elements of Nimue's career and they portray her wholly negatively. Even so, there is one incident which sheds a more favourable light upon her. According to some accounts, when Arthur has been gravely wounded in the battle of Camlann, he is taken to the shore of a lake or sea. Firstly, his sword, Excalibur, is returned to the Lady of the Lake by being cast into the waters. Then a ship appears, bearing Morgan le Fay and other women, amongst whom are the Queen of 'Northgalis' (North Wales), the Queen of the Wasteland, and Nimue. They carry Arthur away to the Isle of Avalon where Morgan cultivates those healing herbs with which she will treat his mortal injuries.

In fact, in the Middle English poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Morgan and Nimue are confounded together and her character as either fairy woman or goddess seems as uncertain as her identity:

> "Through the might of Morgan le Fay, who remains in my house,
> Through the wiles of her witchcraft, a lore well-learned—

Many of the magical arts of Merlin she acquired
For she lavished fervent love long ago
On that susceptible sage; certainly, your knights know
Of their fame.
So ‘Morgan the Goddess’
She accordingly became;
The proudest she can oppress
And to her purpose tame.”[137]

Victorian Revival

After Malory, there were nearly four centuries of neglect of the legend until Matthew Arnold revived it in 1852 by way of an account told by a character in the course of another story. Vivien was, to Merlin, “that false fay, his friend.”

> “She looked so fair, that learned wight
> Forgot his craft and his best wits took flight
> And he grew fond and eager to obey
> His mistress, use her empire as she may.”[138]

Vivien was fully restored to public consciousness by Alfred, Lord Tennyson. The poem *Merlin and Vivien* lies at the heart of his Arthurian epic, *The Idylls of the King*, which he published as an entire work in 1872, although *Vivien* had been composed in about 1859.

In Tennyson’s epic, Vivien is cast alongside Mordred as one of the committed enemies of Arthur’s court. She conspires over an extended period to disrupt his reign and to topple him from his throne and, as a traitor to the realm, she is variously described as a liar, wily, plotting and lurking. Her subterfuge and cunning are facilitated by the fact that men are blinded to her true character: she is at the same time beautiful and sexy:

> “A twist of gold round her hair; a robe
> Of samite without price, that more exprest
> Than hid her, clung about her lissome limbs…”

Men are distracted by her skin-tight dresses, most fatally Merlin, who despite his great age and the enormous disparity in their years, falls helplessly in love with her. This was, of course, Vivien’s plan, because she wishes to learn from him a secret charm “Of woven paces and of waving hands.” This is a powerful and dangerous enchantment and Merlin, even in his obsessed condition, still hesitates to disclose it to her.

However, the pair leave the court together and travel to the Forest of Broceliande in Brittany, where Vivien wears him down with promises of love and devotion. Eventually she triumphs:

> “For Merlin, overtalk’d and overworn,
> Had yielded, told her all the charm, and slept.
> Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm
> Of woven paces and of waving hands,
> And in the hollow oak as he lay as dead,

And lost to life and use and name and fame."

Vivien dismisses the imprisoned old man as a fool—and abandons him there.

Coincidentally, the same year that Tennyson first wrote his poem on the subject, Scot Robert Buchanan composed *Merlin's Tomb*. It is a very similar tale of doomed love. Viviane lures the old magus into a wood and they sit beneath a fairy tree:

"The spot was fair, the lovers fain;
Beneath that hawthorn tree
Sir Merlin and fair Viviane
Disport them lovingly."

Things are not what they seem, however. He falls asleep and she seizes the opportunity to use the spell she has just coaxed from him:

"The lady looked—'He slumbers well,'
(She thought—ah, woe the hour!)
'Now is the time to prove my spell-
My spell of wondrous power!"
Gently Sir Merlin's head she's placed,
And slowly, on the ground;
Then muttering, with her wimple traced
A ring the hawthorn round.
Nine times that magic ring she made-
Nine times that spell she spoke,
Then on her lap the slumberer laid;
But when Sir Merlin woke,
He looked a wild, he looked a long
Upon his prison-bower;
It seemed a castle fair and strong,
Begirt with trench and tower.
Sir Merlin frown'd, Sir Merlin sigh'd,
Fair Viviane laughed the while;
'Such fortune still must fool betide
Will trust a woman's wile!'"

Just like Tennyson, Buchanan conceives of the powerful spell as a charm involving both words and movement. He adds further to the fairy aura of his poem by adding a hawthorn tree as the venue for the wizard's downfall.

Since the appearance of Tennyson's great work, Vivien has fascinated

many other writers with her fatal, feminine power over men. French poet Jean Lorraine composed an entire verse drama about *Viviane* in 1885, which concludes with Merlin being entombed asleep in ‘shadows’ using dance and gestures. The fairy woman does this to satisfy her long-nurtured rancour against him, we are told.[139]

Two more recent writers treated this fairy temptress rather more benignly. In Edward Arlington Robinson’s verse epic, *Merlin* (1917), Vivian is the daughter of a fairy and she “holds him with her love, they say.” Wilfrid Scawen Blunt’s *To Nimue* (1914) is written as an internal monologue by Merlin, who had loved Nimue as a child but thought himself recovered from his passion. He meets her again as a grown woman, and quickly weakens in the face of her adult charms when he finds that she now returns his love.

The story of Merlin and Nimue also had great appeal to painters; understandably, given that it enabled them to juxtapose young, feminine beauty with hoary age. Sir Edward Burne-Jones, for example, twice tackled the story. In both versions, his Nimue has possession of Merlin’s book of spells; in *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1870-74), he places the pair beneath the blossoming hawthorn tree, just as Buchanan described. In addition, the sexual obsession felt by the older man for the girl is captured very well in the recumbent Merlin’s longing look. Other depictions include those by Arthur Rackham (from *The Romance of King Arthur*, 1917) and by Frank Cadogan Cowper. His *Damsel of the Lake: Nimue the Enchantress*, painted in 1924, emphasises the pride and beauty of the fairy. She sits alone, admiring her hair in a mirror in an almost mermaid-like fashion. She is dressed in a robe of flowing white satin, which is embroidered with a spiral pattern on the chest that draws attention to her breasts. A deer, with a golden crown about its neck, sits at her feet. Isolated in a twilight landscape, Nimue is at once alluring yet menacing. Eleanor Fortescue Brickdale’s 1911 *Vivien* is vampish in a tiger skin mantle whilst H. J. Ford chose a leopard’s pelt for her; American illustrator Howard Pyle’s *Enchantress Vivien* has a low-cut dress and an enigmatic gypsy look, weighed down with jewellery; John Smith Moyr in 1875 and Louis Rhead in 1898 made her into something of an exotic dancer. In all these depictions, her magical and sexual power are to the fore.

There have been many poetic, and even more prose versions, of this story since Victorian times, all of them reworking the same basic themes, but as last indications of the pervasive influence of the image of the spiteful and lovely fay maiden, and of the inspiration provided to other artists and writers

by the individual works I have discussed, I quote firstly *The Thorn Tree* (1911), a poem by American author Madison Julius Cawein. He tells us-

"Of the Lady of the Fountain, whom the faery people know,
With her limbs of samite whiteness and her hair of golden glow…
She whose Vivien charms were mistress of the magic Merlin knew,
That could change the dew to glow-worms and the glow-worms into dew.
There's a thorn tree in the forest, and the faeries know the tree,
With its branches gnarled and wrinkled as a face with sorcery;
But the Maytime brings it clusters of a rainy fragrant white,
Like the bloom-bright brows of beauty or a hand of lifted light.
And all day the silence whispers to the sun-ray of the morn
How the bloom is lovely Vivien and how Merlin is the thorn:
How she won the doting wizard with her naked loveliness
Till he told her daemon secrets that must make his magic less.
How she charmed him and enchanted in the thorn-tree's thorns to lie
Forever with his passion that should never dim or die…
How she stooped to kiss the pathos of an elf-lock of his beard,
In a mockery of parting and mock pity of his weird:
But her magic had forgotten that who bends to give a kiss
Will but bring the curse upon them of the person whose it is:
So the silence tells the secret. And at night the faeries see
How the tossing bloom is Vivien, who is struggling to be free,
In the thorny arms of Merlin, who forever is the tree."

We might leave Nimue and Merlin united in their fate, then, both betrayed by their own magic, but the pathos and tragedy of their story continues to attract authors, even today. Modern-day internet poet John Bliven Morin was drawn again to the blind passion of older lover for a young woman. In the *Love Song of Ambrosius* (which uses an ancient Welsh name for the magician) the wizard willingly invites her into his domain, oblivious to the threat she poses and seeking to assuage any fears she may feel with promises to share his secret knowledge and his spell books:

"And in exchange you offer love,
Which I have never known;
Your tender kiss, your gentle touch,
And that soft moan.

And should you take my power
And leave me powerless
Still I give it willingly
For your caress.”

Nimue/ Vivien embodies both the otherness and the fatal sexual allure of the fairy lover; this combination remains as irresistible as ever. We see this even in the modern character of Tinker Bell, the last famous fairy to be discussed.

Tinker Bell

The final famous fairy we must mention is the least traditional of all. This is J. M. Barrie's Tinker Bell, a late arrival on the scene who has quickly established herself as almost the archetypal female fairy.

Tinker Bell is a literary creation, who appeared first in Barrie's 1904 play *Peter Pan* and subsequently in his 1911 novelisation of the story, *Peter and Wendy*. She is the author's invention, but she nevertheless incorporates some traditional fairy elements into her character and conduct. Barrie also mentioned fairies in his wider 'Peter Pan' corpus, in books such as *The Little White Bird* (1902) and *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* (1906).

Tink & Tradition

First and foremost, Tinker Bell is diminutive, as tradition had come to expect. In fact, all of the fairies in Barrie's stories are small, but Tinker Bell is described most evocatively as being "no longer than your hand, but still growing."[140] Furthermore, like many native British faes, she has her own language. Barrie has her speaking a tongue that is incomprehensible to human children (although Peter Pan has learned it). Her speech is said to be like "the loveliest tinkle of golden bells," but it's also described as high-pitched squeaking. This description fits well with many older eye witness accounts of fairy speech.[141] We are told, furthermore, that babies are born able to speak the fairy language but quickly forget it as they grow and learn their parents' tongue.[142]

Lastly, and most memorably, there is Tinker Bell's bad temperament. This is seen in *Peter Pan* in the fairy's vindictive jealously towards Wendy and in the use generally by Barrie's fairies of physical chastisements. In this respect, too, Barrie's fairies are very authentic to British tradition.[143] They tweak Peter's nose when he sleeps across a fairy path; they 'mischief' those they take against. In the novel *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens*, Barrie explains that "Nearly all the nasty accidents you meet with in the Gardens occur because the fairies have taken an ill-will against you and so it behoves you to be careful what you say about them…" "If the fairies see you … they will mischief you—stab you to death, or compel you to nurse their children, or turn you into something tedious, like an evergreen oak."[144]

Of Tinker Bell's character specifically, Barrie explained that she "was not

all bad: or, rather, she was all bad just now, but, on the other hand, sometimes she was all good. Fairies have to be one thing or the other, because being so small they unfortunately have room for one feeling only at a time. They are, however, allowed to change, only it must be a compete change."[145] For readers familiar with traditional fairy lore, these accounts of abductions, violence and the need to speak circumspectly in their presence will once again sound very familiar.

Temptress Tink

Tink herself is introduced thus: she was "exquisitely gowned in a skeleton leaf cut low and square, through which her figure could be seen to the best advantage. She was slightly inclined to *embonpoint."*[146] Later Wendy describes her cattily as "an abandoned little creature" and that aura of wickedness or wantonness pervades the character.[147] All in all, Tinker Bell appears to be an adult—or nearly so: recall that Barrie tells us that she is "still growing," perhaps a subtle suggestion of an ongoing sexual maturation—those curves are getting curvier. Worse still, she is "quite a common fairy" and is not very polite, using "offensive" and "impudent" language to Wendy in their squabble over Peter.[148] This might be read as sexual possessiveness, or it might be the childhood exclusiveness of 'the best friend.' Given that Tinker Bell is prepared to try to kill her love rival, the former seems most likely.

Tink's sexual allure and her strong attachment to her chosen male are strongly reminiscent of the dangerous fairy lovers of folklore, creatures such as the Scottish *leanan sith*, of whom Barrie might have been aware. The motif of sexual jealousy between Tinkerbell and Wendy (who is just feeling the first stirrings of maternal protectiveness) is one of the most interesting elements of the *Peter Pan* stories. It might be thought to accord ill with Barrie's claims for a natural bond between fairies and very young children, but perhaps in that very contradiction we find a true expression of the contrariness of Faery.

All these familiar folklore elements notwithstanding, significant aspects of the character and abilities of Tinker Bell and the other fairies in Barrie's stories have nothing at all to do with British tradition. Probably Barrie's most notable invention is fairy-dust, which enables the fairies to fly. It covers Tinker Bell and rubs off; we are not told exactly what it is, but there are possible links to the sandman, as well, perhaps, to the properties of fern

seed found in folk magical tradition.[149]

When *Peter Pan* originally performed in the theatre, Tinker Bell's sexuality and feminine corporeality was *not* an issue; instead, she lost any physical form at all. The problem of depicting her in the play was solved by means of a flickering, dancing light, which was reflected onto the stage using a mirror. This conceit has been very influential since (along too, perhaps, with some confusion over the nature of 'fairy lights' on Christmas trees, in which I take the 'fairy' element merely to denote tiny size, as against any supernatural aspect). The conception of fairies as moving points of light seems much more common now than it was in the recorded folklore preceding *Peter Pan* (although it was not entirely absent) and this development could well be ascribed to the influence of Barrie's stage play. Be that as it may, Tinker Bell's future place in popular consciousness was definitively secured by another sort of flickering light.

In the Walt Disney Studios cartoon of *Peter Pan* (1953), Tinker Bell was animated, but had no dialogue. The character has since become one of the company's most important branding icons, in part because she symbolises 'the magic of Disney.' She has featured in television and film commercials and in the opening credits to television programmes, sprinkling dust with a wand in reference to the 'magic' of Disney's films (although the 1953 animated version of Tinker Bell never actually used a wand). So popular has Tink proved that a number of spin-off films have been made featuring her as sole star. Her iconic status is confirmed by the fact that several witnesses reporting encounters to the recent *Fairy Census* explicitly compare what they saw to Tinkerbell or to Disney.[150]

Barrie was clear about the womanly reality of his Tinker Bell. The cartoon version was faithful to this, although she lost the plumpness and, in fact, seems rather concerned by the size of her hips.[151] It is often said that the original model for the cartoon character was Marilyn Monroe; in truth, animator Marc Davis derived his inspiration from another actress, Margaret Kerry. Davis drew Tinker Bell as young, white and attractive, with a pronounced hour-glass figure, her blonde hair in a bun, her eyes oversized and blue and her lips scarlet. She is clad in an extremely short green dress and green slippers and trails fairy dust when she flies (with her gauzy wings). In this overtly sexualised form, Tinker Bell is probably one of the most authentic surviving aspects of Barrie's work. Undoubtedly, Tink helped to

cement the image of the pretty, tiny, winged female fairy in the public imagination. She has become a firm children's favourite, and the Disney vision of her is an icon in its own right. As I stated at the start of this chapter, Tink is now (for many) the exemplar of how fairies look. It's intriguing, nonetheless, how much she preserves of the original folklore fairy in her character *and* looks.

Famous Fairies in Art

John Simmons, *Titania Sleeps*

Sir Noel Paton, *Oberon Listening to the Mermaid*

Scott, *Ariel and Caliban*

Fuseli, *Queen Mab*

Sir Noel Paton, *Puck and Fairies*

Sir Frank Cadogan Cowper, *The Damsel of the Lake, called Nimue the Enchanter*

[1] See, for example, *The Bridal of Triermain, Rokeby,* canto LV & *Marmion*, canto LI.

[2] See too my *Fayerie,* 2020.

[3] Ovid, Book III, line 173.

[4] See for example Gavin Douglas' version in 1513 or Arthur Golding's of 1565.

[5] Spenser, *A Letter to Authors;* Lyly, *Endimion,* IV, 3.

[6] Act III, scene 1.

[7] See too John Keats, *Sonnet V, To a Friend*, or Francis Noel Clarke Munday, *The Fall of Needwood,* 1830.

[8] Robert Henry Forster (1867-1923) dressed Titania in a dress of petals in *Wallflowers*.

[9] See *Midsummer Night's Dream,* Act II, scene 1.

[10] See too Peter John Allan, *To Titania, Queen of Fairyland, St Valentine's Day.*

[11] For example, William Lisle Bowles (1762-1850), *Fairy Sketch—Scene: Netley Abbey;* Madison Cawein, *Moths & Fireflies* and *Morning Glories;* John Keats, *To Charles Cowden Clarke*; Barcroft Brake (1866-92), *Box Tree's Love.*

[12] Watts, *A Lament for Fairies;* see too Charles Lamb, *The Fairy*, Mathilde Blind, *Cleve Woods,* or Fenton Johnson, *Dream Song.*

[13] 1878 edition, 134.

[14] Number-Nip, also called Rubezahl, is a Germanic sprite whose story was made familiar by the Grimm Brothers. As we'll see a little later, he also featured in an opera with King Oberon.

[15] 1878 edition, 172.

[16] Graves, *Fusiliers and Fairies,* 1918.

[17] *A Treatise Concerning the Original of Unbelief,* 1625, 178-9.

[18] *Ballad,* chapters I & III.

[19] *Faerie Queen,* 1590, Book II, c.10, stanzas 75-76.

[20] De Lattre, *English Fairy Poetry*, 112.

[21] Act III, 2.

[22] Act IV, 1; Act V, 2.

[23] *The Cousenages of the Wests,* London, 1613.

[24] From *Amyntas*, respectively Act I, scene 3; I, 6; IV, 6 and III, 4.

[25] See too Randolph's *Jealous Lovers,* c.1632.

[26] Browne, 1624-8, Book III, song 1.

[27] Herrick, *Oberon's Feast* and *Oberon's Palace.*

[28] See too Mary Elizabeth Robinson (1775-1818), *Oberon to Titania*, in which he invites his "tiny love" to sip dew from an acorn goblet; John Keats, *On Receiving a Curious Shell;* Kate Seymour Maclean, *Pansies*.

[29] See too Bulwer-Lytton, *To the Ideal*; Victor James Daley, *A Christmas Eve;* William Wordsworth, *The Triad;* Madison Cawein, *Willow Wood*.

[30] See too Walter de la Mare, *Widow's Weeds;* Sydney Dobell, *Grass from the Battlefield;* Madison Cawein, *The Berriers.*

[31] But see Keat's *Lamia Part One*, for a more martial Oberon.

[32] *Letters of Horace Walpole,* 1890, vol.1.

[33] See too William Cowper, *To Miss Macartney* and Barron Field, *Botany Bay Flowers.*

[34] Olcott, *The Book of Elves & Fairies,* New York, 1918, 212.

[35] See too William Allingham, *The Daffodil;* or Robert Henry Forster, *Sweet Peas.*

[36] *Tempest* Act V scene 1.

[37] Agrippa, Book III, Part 3.

[38] *English Fairy Poetry,* 116-117.

[39] Act V, scene 1

[40] Act V scene 1 and Act II scene 1.

[41] Act I, scene 2.

[42] See too 'Ariel' by Albert Pike (1809-91).

[43] Canto I, lines 65-66.

[44] Canto II lines 59-67.

[45] Illustrations to *Tales from Shakespeare*, Charles and Mary Lamb, 1909.

[46] Robert Burton, in his *Anatomy of Melancholy,* Part I, section 2, names Habundia as the queen of the 'water devils'—the naiads, water nymphs or fairies.

[47] Note, however, that in Sloane MS 1727, a seventeenth century magical text held by the British Library, Mab is demoted to the position of "Lady to the Queen," the monarch herself remaining unnamed.

[48] Jonson, *Entertainment at Althorpe*, also called *The Satyr*, 1603.

[49] Act I, 4.

[50] Act II, 6, also Act I, 3; see too Randolph's *Jealous Lovers* Act III, scene 7 in which Asotus praises her as "Mab, my Empresse fair."

[51] Act I, 3 & II, 7.

[52] *Romeo & Juliet*, Act I, 4.

[53] Randolph, *A Pleasant Comedie, entituled Hey for Honesty, Down with Knavery, translated out of Aristophanes his Plutus,* Act II, scene 6.

[54] 'The Holly Bush,' in *Men Miracles with Other Poems,* London, 1646.

[55] For example, Randolph, *Amyntas,* IV, 4, Jonson, *The Satyr*, 1603; Milton, *L'Allegro,* 102.

[56] Jonson, *The Satyr.*

[57] *Dream,* Act II, 1.

[58] Jonson, *The Satyr*, 1603.

[59] Published in 1891 as part of *Lancelot and Guenevere—A Poem in Dramas.*

[60] *Fairyland,* George Barlow; *Puck to Queen Mab,* H. Sinclair Lewis; *Queen Mab in the Village,* Vachell Lindsay; *The Fairies' Passage,* James Mangan; *On Midsummer Night,* Madison Cawein; *Fairy Sky,* John Russell Hayes; *An Evening Dream,* Sydney Dobell.

[61] Sir Arthur Quiller Couch, *Of Three Children Choosing.*

[62] Chapter 2.

[63] Chapter 3.

[64] Chapter 5.

[65] Chapter 8.

[66] Chapter 12.

[67] Act V, 1.

[68] Churchyard, *A Handful of Gladsome Verses,* 1592.

[69] John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore,* 1901, 147.

[70] *Notes & Queries,* vol.III, no.54, 1850, 388 and see my *Beyond Faery,* 2020.

[71] See too Corbet's *Iter Borealis.*

[72] Briggs, *Dictionary of Fairies,* under 'Robin Goodfellow;' see too my *Fairy Ballads and Rhymes* (2020).

[73] For the full text, see my *Fayerie* (2020).

[74] *Mercurius Fumigosus, or the Smoking Nocturnall,* no. 32, January 3rd-10th, 1655.

[75] Guilpin, *Skialetheia, or a Shadowe of Truth in certaine Epigrams and Satyres,* 1598, 'Satyra Sexta.' On the other faery beasts mentioned, see my *Beyond Faery,* 2020.

[76] Minor White Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies,* 1930, 220.

[77] See too William Baldwin, *Beware the Cat,* 1584, 22 & William Cartwright, *The Ordinary* 1651, III, 1.

[78] Names taken from Butler, *Hudibras*; Beaumont, *Knight of the Burning Pestle;* Milton, *L'Allegro; Misognus* and Thomas Churchyard, *A Handful of Gladsome Verses.*

[79] Bod. MS Ashmole 36-37, no.317, 306; see too Ben Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass* and Anon, *Wily Beguiled.*

[80] Burton, *Anatomy,* 1621, 124.

[81] Langland, *Piers Plowman,* Passus 16, line 263; see too the 13th century Middle English *Sinners Beware!* and *St. Gregory.*

[82] *Wily Beguiled,* 1606, line 479.

[83] See too Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft,* 'To the Reader' and *Grim the Collier of Croydon.* On the black dogs and shugs, see my *Beyond Faery,* 2020.

[84] Gascoigne, *Buggbears,* Act III, line 58; see too Spenser, *Epithalamion,* lines 341-343, *Tarlton's News Out of Purgatory,* 1588, 55 & 222, or George Munday, *Fidele & Fidelio,* line 566; *The Masque at Coleorton.*

[85] Scot, *Discoverie,* 1584, 'To the Reader;' Book IV, c.19; Book VII chapters 2 & 15; Book VIII, c.1; Book XVI, c.7;

[86] Warner, *The Shepherd's Dream;* Jonson, *Love Restored.*

[87] *Misognus* I, 3; see also Jonson, *Love Restored.* In *Wily Beguiled,* 1606, Robin appears in an "ougly uncouth shape" in order to scare a cruel father.

[88] Churchyard, *A Handful of Gladsome Verses;* Bod. MS Ashmole 36-37, no.317, 306.

[89] Collier, *A Book of Roxburghe Ballads,* 1847, 35; Rowlands, *More Knaves Yet?* 'Of Ghoastes and Goblins;' *Tarleton's News out of Purgatorie,* 1590; *Love Restored.*

[90] *Cobler of Canterburie,* 1608, 'Robin Goodfellow's Epistle;' Haughton, *Grim the Collier,* 1605, Act IV, scene 1; *Wily Beguiled,* Act IV, scene 1.

[91] Heywood, *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody,* 1605.

[92] Tyndale, *Exposition on the First Gospel of St John.*

[93] Heywood, *Hierarchie of Blessed Angels*, 574; Tyndale, *The Obedience of the Christian Man.*

[94] Cavendish, *Pastime of the Queen of Fairy*; see too Anon., *Lady Alimony*, 1659, Act III, scene 5; *Roxburghe Ballads*, vol.2, 'The Devil and the Scold.'

[95] Jonson, *Love Restored*, 1612; see too Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 124; Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Book IV, c.10.

[96] See too S. Harsenet, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, 1603, 134.

[97] For example, *Grim the Collier of Croydon* (1662).

[98] See, for instance, *Love Restored* or Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Book IV, c.10.

[99] Scot, *Discoverie*, Book IV, c.10.

[100] *Tarlton's News out of Purgatory*, 1588, 55 & 222; Jonson, *Oberon the Fairy*, 1611; Samuel Rowlands, 'Of Ghoastes and Goblins,' in *More Knaves Yet?*, 1613; Churchyard, *A Handful of Gladsome Verses*, 1592; *Grim the Collier of Croydon*; Harsenet, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures*, 1603, 134.

[101] *Midsummer Night's Dream*, III, 2; also *Love Restore, Grim the Collier of Croydon* and *Wily Beguiled*, 1606.

[102] Act II, 1.

[103] Act III, 2.

[104] Act V, 2.

[105] Latham, *The Elizabethan Fairies*, 220.

[106] Act I, 1.

[107] Jonson, *The Devil is an Ass; Grim the Collier of Croydon.*

[108] Middleton, *The Witch;* Heywood, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, 1634; Jonson, *The Sad Shepherd*, 1637; Shadwell, *The Lancashire Witches*, 1682.

[109] *Halloween, 1916.* See too Madison Cawein, *On Midsummer Night, Wood Dreams, The World of Faery* and *Fairies;* Thomas Hood, *Parental Ode;* E. J. Rupert Atkinson, *The Flight of Puck.*

[110] Lee-Hamilton, *The Death of Puck*, published 1916.

[111] Kipling, *Puck of Pook's Hill*, 1908, 'Weland's Sword;' see too *Rewards and Fairies*, 1910.

[112] W. Henderson, *Folk-Lore of the Northern Counties*, 258-62.

[113] Edward Clodd, *Tom Tit Tot—An Essay on Savage Philosophy*, 1898.

[114] For the latter versions, see Robert Chambers, *Popular Rhymes of Scotland*, 1870, 72-77.

[115] Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, 45.

[116] See my *Fairy Ballads & Rhymes*, 2020.

[117] See John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, vol.1, 229-30 & vol.2, 584-98.

[118] See *Folklore*, vol.2, 1891, 132 & 246.

[119] The knocking stone is a concave boulder used for getting the husk of grain.

[120] In Northern English and Scots dialects, 'water' is pronounced 'watter' so that we have a proper rhyme in this charm.

[121] Whether fairy law mandates such a delay, or whether it is just a dramatic pause used by storytellers to create tension, is unknown.

[122] 'Ochone' is an expression equivalent to 'woe is me.'

[123] The ‘oories’ seem to be fears or worries; ‘Nick’ is the devil.

[124] British Association’s Papers of the Liverpool Meeting, 1896, 613.

[125] M. Pennar, *The Black Book of Carmarthen,* 1989, 104.

[126] E. K. Chambers, *Arthur of Britain,* 1927, 18.

[127] Chambers, *Arthur of Britain,* 17, citing *De Rebus Gestis Regum Anglorum,* Book III, 287; Wace, *Roman de Brut.*

[128] *Chronicles,* Book V, c.14.

[129] *The Fall of Princes,* 1431-8, Book VIII, c.24

[130] Malory, *Morte D’Arthur,* Book III, chapters 167 & 168.

[131] Verses XXX & XXXI.

[132] Robert Hawker, *To Alfred Tennyson.*

[133] Tennyson, *Lancelot and Elaine,* 1859, lines 1249-51.

[134] Whom Lewis Spence connects with the Welsh moon goddess Rhiannon (*British fairy origins,* p.147).

[135] *Morte d’Arthur* c.58.

[136] Drayton, Song IV.

[137] Lines 2446-2455.

[138] Arnold, *Merlin and the Fay Vivian* in ‘Tristram and Iseult,’ in *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems,* 1852.

[139] Similar ‘evil Viviens’ are found in W. B. Yeats, *Time and the Witch Vivien,* 1889; Ernest Rhys, *The Death of Merlin,* 1898 and Ethel Watts Mumford, *Merlin and Vivien—a Lyrical Drama,* 1907.

[140] *Peter & Wendy* c.3.

[141] See my *British Fairies* c.3.

[142] *Peter & Wendy* cc.3 & 10;
Kensington Gardens cc.4 & 5; *Little White Bird* cc.XVI & XXI.

[143] *British Fairies* c.20.

[144] *Kensington Gardens* c.5.

[145] *Peter & Wendy* c.4.

[146] *Peter & Wendy* c.3.

[147] *Peter & Wendy* c.10.

[148] *Peter & Wendy* cc.3 & 10.

[149] *Peter & Wendy* c.3.

[150] See for instance Young, *Census,* numbers 61, 100 & 122.

[151] In the scene with the mirror.